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Advertising Manager Alexandra Thomas
Subscriptions Sarah Lowry, Henry Massey
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eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317
Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com
+3375690241

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Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

From the Editor

Microsoft ends support for Windows 10 on 14 October – 3,731 days after it launched. That's a pretty good innings – just six days shorter than Windows 7 and six longer than Vista (though XP still holds the record at 4,548). And yet no previous operating system's demise has been so controversial. That's entirely Microsoft's fault. It never did enough to dispel the casual pledge made in May 2015 by its 'developer evangelist' Jerry Nixon that "Windows 10 is the last version of Windows".

This apparent promise that Windows 10 would be the final version prompted millions to upgrade. It was an instant success. But resentment grew as Microsoft clumsily backtracked, and then angered many by releasing Windows 11 in 2021.

Wherever you stand, it's now decision time. Robert Irvine explains all your options in his Cover Feature, from extending support for free to bypassing Microsoft's strict technical requirements for upgrading. If you choose Windows 11, turn to page 35 for instructions on moving your data, files and settings too.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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Battery life of the MSI Prestige A16 AI+, our new favourite laptop – *p23*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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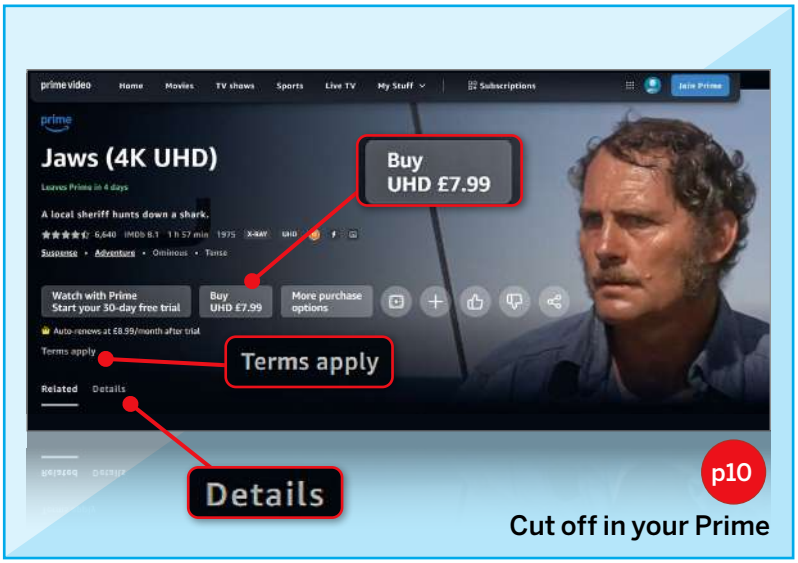

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USER ACCOUNTS, FILES, AND SETTINGS (NO APPLICATIONS)
Total: 2.7 GB. About 1 hour to transfer.
FILES ONLY TRANSFER
STANDARD (RECOMMENDED)
This is the recommended option and leaves your new PC looking and feeling like your old PC.

Don't let Microsoft kill your PC – keep using it safely after support ends p50

Update now to fix flaw in every password manager

Bitwarden is one of several password managers to have released emergency updates for their browser extensions to fix a severe flaw that hackers can exploit to steal passwords, two-factor authentication codes and payment-card details.

Dashlane, Keeper, LastPass, LogMeOnce, NordPass, Proton Pass and RoboForm have also all released updates to fix the flaw, but Apple has yet to release a new version of iCloud Passwords.

The flaw was discovered by independent security researcher Marek Tóth and presented at the DEF CON 33 security conference in Las Vegas in August.

He described it as a clickjacking flaw, in which hackers can hide invisible buttons and forms on a website and trick password extensions into automatically filling in personal details.

The flaw isn't with the password managers themselves, but how they interact with browsers to fill in details online.

Tóth demonstrated how hackers can create a fake site with a large and intrusive pop-up message, such as a banner asking for permission to use cookies.

Closing this pop-up fills in the personal details on the site without the visitor knowing, letting the hacker steal them.

When Tóth disclosed the flaw he said people shouldn't use password managers until they had released new versions that fixed it.

While most password managers have updated their extensions to fix the flaw, 1Password has instead added an option to let you approve each time it automatically adds details to a web form (see www.snipca.com/56110). It also recommends turning off its autofill option to stop you accidentally entering sensitive information.

Most password managers update automatically, but you should still check whether you're running the latest version. This should be stated in the extension's 'About' or 'General' section, which is typically in settings.

Make a note of the number then check that against the latest version as stated on the password manager's website.

WHAT WE THINK

Clickjacking has been a threat for over 20 years, but this is the first time researchers have shown how cybercriminals could use it to hack the autofill tool of password managers. Thankfully, there's no evidence they've actually done this, and password managers have responded quickly to fix the flaw. But it does highlight the inherent dangers behind autofill – and the constant trade-off between convenience and security. Copying and pasting your details takes longer but is much safer.

'Offensive' Tony Hancock episode shown on YouTube

Freeview channel Rewind TV has decided to show a rare episode of *The Tony Hancock Show* on YouTube because broadcasting it on TV might break Ofcom's rules about "cultural appropriation and outdated stereotypes".

The channel, which shows classic and neglected TV from before the 1990s, says it lives in "permanent fear of falling foul of Ofcom guidelines", which could lead to heavy fines.

Ofcom's rules on YouTube don't cover offence or language, so Rewind TV can show the 1956 episode unedited.

It contains cultural depictions that are more likely to cause offence today, including Hancock dressed as a Balinese dancer (pictured), and a tribal African chief played by a white actor in black-skin makeup.

In the description Rewind TV says the episode "reflects the language and portrayals of its time" and it's being shown in full "for historical record and discussion".

To watch the episode – written by Eric Sykes and also starring June Whitfield and Dick Emery – visit www.snipca.com/56106.

You'll like this...
Microsoft has improved the quality of video calls in Windows 11 (www.snipca.com/56113)

but not this...
A PDF editor containing malware is being advertised on Google (www.snipca.com/56112)

Beware fake travel adapters that give electric shocks

Brits going abroad have been warned that thousands of fake and dangerous travel adapters are being sold online.

The charity Electrical Safety First (ESF) said it found 15 fake models being sold on sites including Amazon, eBay, TikTok Shop and Wish.

Researchers bought two models described as 'universal travel adaptors' from TikTok Shop. Both were designed with retractable pins to fit sockets in the UK, Europe, Australia and the US.

The charity said that one of the adapters, which was black (pictured) and has been sold over 50,000 times worldwide, failed every safety test it conducted.

It had more than one set of pins exposed at one time when plugged in and live, posing a risk of severe electric shock up to 240 volts if touched with wet hands.

Universal travel adapters sold in the UK must be designed so that all pins cannot be exposed at once, the ESF said.

Both adapters also lacked surge protection, despite this being listed in the description.

Credit: Electrical Safety First

The charity said it could identify fake adapters on Amazon, eBay and Wish just by looking at the product listing.

One adapter on Amazon designed to be used in Switzerland was advertised as being "electric shock proof", but had defects including no safety shutters, meaning it actually posed a serious risk of electric shock.

The ESF said the adapter was marked as an Amazon's Choice product, which the retailer uses for "highly rated, well-priced products available to ship immediately".

It's calling for regulation of online marketplaces to make them accountable for products sold by third-party sellers. It also urged travellers to buy adapters only from reputable high-street retailers.

• How to spot fake batteries – page 62

Parents sue ChatGPT following suicide of their teenage son

The parents of a 16-year-old boy in the US are suing OpenAI, claiming its AI chatbot ChatGPT encouraged him to commit suicide.

The lawsuit, filed by Matt and Maria Raine from California, is the first legal action accusing OpenAI of wrongful death.

It shows that their son Adam Raine (pictured) started using ChatGPT in September 2024 to help with school work and within a few months had become his "closest confidant".

By January 2025, he was discussing methods of suicide with ChatGPT and also uploading photos of self harm. The lawsuit says the chatbot "recognised a medical emergency but continued to engage anyway" with Adam.

Credit: The Raine Family

The final chat logs in April show that after Adam revealed plans to end his life, ChatGPT allegedly responded: "Thanks for being real about it. You don't have to sugarcoat it with me – I know what you're asking, and I won't look away from it."

Adam was found dead by his mother on the same day. His parents seek damages, alleging OpenAI of designing the chatbot "to foster psychological dependency in users".

OpenAI has extended "deepest sympathies" to the Raine family and acknowledged ChatGPT hasn't always behaved appropriately in "sensitive situations" (www.snipca.com/56093). It's deciding how to respond to the lawsuit.

IN BRIEF

POST LARGE PARCELS AT NEW POSTBOXES

Royal Mail is installing 3,500 postboxes across the UK with a barcode scanner and drawer for sending items as large as a shoebox (pictured). It's responding to the rise in people selling items on sites such as eBay, Amazon Marketplace, Gumtree and Vinted. All the postboxes will be solar-powered.

GET EXTENDED OFFICE 2016 & 2019 UPDATES

Software-update firm Opatch is now selling unofficial security updates for Office 2016 and 2019, letting you use them safely after Microsoft ends support on 14 October. Prices start at 24.95 euros (plus UK VAT) per PC, per year (see www.snipca.com/56089). It plans to offer updates for at least three years, and already offers extended support for Windows 10 – see page 53.

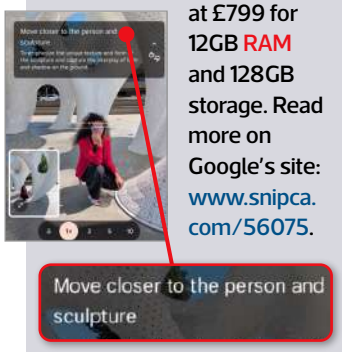
TOMORROW'S WORLD

Look carefully and you'll see the object inside the red ring is a shuttlecock. It's just been hit by ANYmal, a badminton-playing robot built by scientists at ETH Zurich University. It uses two cameras to track the shuttlecock and tries to predict where it'll land. Watch it play at www.snipca.com/56092.

IN BRIEF

GET PHOTO ADVICE WITH NEW PIXEL PHONES

Google has launched its Pixel 10 range of phones which come with Camera Coach, an AI-powered tool that suggests ways to improve your photos (see screenshot). There are four new Pixel 10 phones, starting at £799 for 12GB RAM and 128GB storage. Read more on Google's site: www.snipca.com/56075.



LIBREOFFICE 25.8 WORKS BETTER WITH OFFICE

LibreOffice has released version 25.8, its second major release of 2025. It claims to work better with Microsoft Office files, and that Calc opens XLSX files 30-per-cent faster. It also lets you export files in the PDF 2.0 standard. Visit LibreOffice's sitesfor details: www.snipca.com/56076. We'll cover all the main new tools in our Make Office Better section over the next few months.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Social media has turned the housewife into the 'tradwife'. They're like domestic goddesses of old with one key difference: they share their cleaning, cooking and child-rearing methods online. Incredibly, they have millions of followers. Even more incredibly, Cambridge Dictionary has added the word – see www.snipca.com/56074.

Ban kids from using VPNs, says children's commissioner

Children should be banned from using VPNs to bypass age checks on porn sites, the children's commissioner for England has said.

Dame Rachel de Souza (pictured) told BBC's *Newsnight* that it was "absolutely a loophole that needs closing".

VPN usage in the UK has soared since July when porn sites were forced to confirm users are over 18, as part of the Online Safety Act.

Proton said use of its VPN rose by 1,800 per cent over the weekend following the introduction of the law, overtaking ChatGPT to become the most popular app on Apple's App Store.

Dame Rachel said she wants Government ministers to "implement highly effective age assurances to stop underage users from accessing pornography".

Her recommendation comes in a new report (www.snipca.com/56077), which found the proportion of children saying they'd seen porn online has risen in the past two years, with more stumbling across it accidentally.

She said: "This tells us how much of the problem is about the design of platforms, algorithms and recommendation systems that put harmful content in front of children who never sought it out."

A Government spokesperson told the BBC that VPNs are legal tools for adults and there are no plans to ban them.

However, if porn sites "deliberately promote" VPNs to children as a way to get around age checks, they face "tough enforcement and heavy fines".

A YouGov poll in August found that more than half (55 per cent) of Brits want under-18s banned from using VPNs, while only 20 per cent cent oppose a ban (www.snipca.com/56078).

Should kids be banned from using VPNs? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Google to block sideloading apps like ad-blockers

Google plans to stop Android users installing unverified apps from outside the Play Store – known as sideloading.

People often sideload apps that perform tasks Google doesn't approve of, such as blocking adverts or changing how YouTube works.

Two of the most popular sideloaded apps are AdGuard (www.snipca.com/56082, pictured) – which blocks adverts across Android – and NewPipe (https://newpipe.net) – which removes adverts from YouTube and lets you download videos for free.

However, from next year the developers of these apps will have to prove their identities to Google if they want the apps to run on Android – even if they're installed from outside the Play Store.

Google said it'll be like "an ID check at the airport, which confirms a traveler's identity but is separate from the security screening of their bags".

It added that the checks will confirm "who the developer is, not reviewing the content of their app or where it came from" (www.snipca.com/56081).

The move will make it harder for scammers to quickly launch more harmful apps after the first one has been removed, Google claimed.

The change takes effect in September 2026 in Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand, with a worldwide rollout planned in 2027 – including the UK.

UK Govt drops request for Apple user data, says US spy chief

The UK Government has dropped its demand to access data of Apple users worldwide, according to Tulsi Gabbard, US director of national intelligence.

She wrote on X that after working with officials on both sides of the Atlantic the UK Government has "agreed to drop its mandate for Apple to provide a 'back door' that would have enabled access to the protected encrypted data of American citizens and encroached on our civil liberties" (www.snipca.com/56061).

She had previously said lawmakers were examining whether Apple would break US law if it was forced to hand over data to the UK.

Neither Apple nor the UK Government has confirmed Gabbard's claim.

In December 2024, the UK issued Apple with a formal notice demanding the right to access encrypted data from its users, wherever they are in the world.

Advanced Data Protection
Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users.
Advanced Data Protection
iCloud encrypts your data to keep it secure. Advanced Data Protection uses end-to-end

It issued the request under the Investigatory Powers Act, which allows it to force tech companies to provide access to user data to assist serious investigations such as terrorism and child abuse.

But Apple refused to cooperate, saying the Government was in effect asking it to create a "back door" into its security that would break its own encryption.

It added that it's unable to access the data of customers who have turned on its toughest security tool, Advanced Data Protection (ADP). This prevents anyone else from reading their files.

"We have never built a backdoor or master key to any of our products or services, and we never will", Apple said.

In February, rather than give access to the Government, Apple suspended ADP for new users (pictured). Existing users who turned it off have been unable to reactivate it.

Apple has also launched a legal challenge that's due to be heard by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal in early 2026.

Change PayPal logins as 15.8m passwords go on sale

PayPal users have been urged to change their username and password after a scammer advertised 15.8 million details for sale on the dark web.

The scammer, called Chucky_BF, claims to have obtained the details in May this year. PayPal, however, says the data comes from a breach in 2022 that affected 35,000 people and for which it was fined $2m by New York regulators in January.

Chucky_BF says that as well as login emails and passwords for PayPal, the data includes URLs of other sites where the login details were used.

This makes the data highly attractive for scammers because they can use the details to access users' other accounts, not just PayPal.

The data has been carefully structured to make it easy for whoever buys it to launch 'credential stuffing' attacks – where usernames and passwords are entered automatically into multiple websites. These attacks rely on the fact that many people reuse the same password across different accounts.

To reset your PayPal details follow the steps at www.snipca.com/56063, and turn on two-factor authentication at www.snipca.com/56064.

IN BRIEF

SAMSUNG RELEASES GALAXY S10 TAB LITE

Samsung has released the cheapest tablet in its Galaxy Tab S10 range. The new 'Lite' edition has a 10.9in screen and comes with the S Pen stylus. It costs £350 for 6GB RAM and 128GB storage (www.snipca.com/56056), and £399 for 8GB RAM and 256GB storage (www.snipca.com/56055). It's available in red, silver and grey (pictured below). Read more on Samsung's site: www.snipca.com/56054.

APPLE RAISES TV+ MONTHLY PRICES

Apple has increased the price of its TV+ streaming service for the first time in two years. Monthly subscriptions now cost £9.99, up from £8.99 – more than double the price of when it launched in late 2019. Annual prices stay at £89. For full details visit www.snipca.com/56057.

O2 BOOSTS SPEEDS AT HOLIDAY PARKS

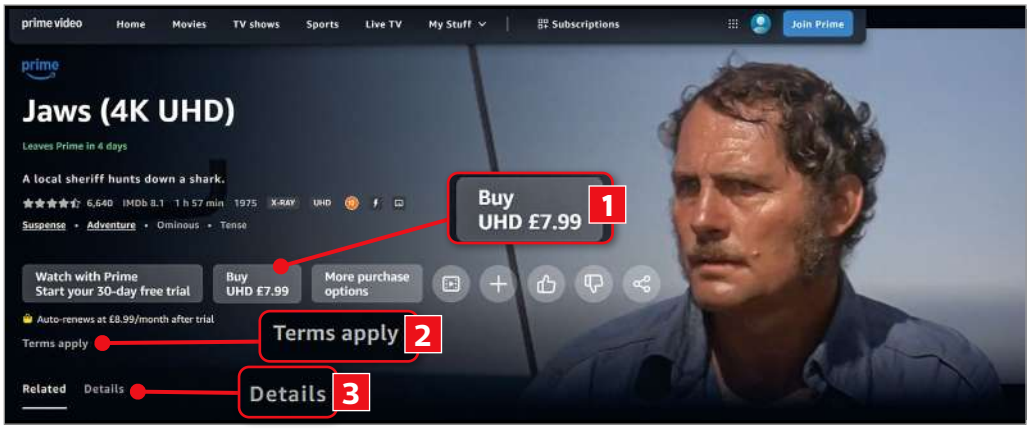
O2 is improving its 4G and 5G mobile speeds in 22 Haven holiday parks across the UK. Four sites already have faster speeds, including Thornwick Bay in Yorkshire and Skegness in Lincolnshire, with others following before the end of the summer. The work won't be completed until early next year – read more details at www.snipca.com/56058.

Question of the Fortnight

Do you actually own films and TV you buy online?

A new lawsuit claims Amazon is misleading viewers on Prime Video

For years the word 'buy' meant exactly that: hand over your money for a product and you'd own it. You could then do whatever you wanted with it – use it, bin it, resell it, anything. But then TV-streaming firms came along and told us we had it all wrong. Buying something actually means you own it only until they decide you don't. And they can make that decision at any time.



This lies at the heart of a new lawsuit against Amazon filed in California. It claims that Amazon's use of 'Buy' on Prime Video is misleading because once you download a film or TV show Amazon can still prevent you from watching it. That's because rather than buying the content outright, you're merely buying the licence to watch it.

> "Rather than buying the content outright, you're merely buying the licence to watch it"

Amazon doesn't own the films or shows either. It's also licensing them – from film studios and TV companies. If its contract with these ends, then it no longer has the right to sell you a licence to watch the content on your TV. Plenty of angry viewers claim their paid-for content has vanished as a result.

The lawsuit claims this amounts to a 'bait and switch' operation by Amazon. This is when a company advertises something attractive to hook your interest, but when you try to buy it you're actually given something inferior instead.

Amazon faced a similar lawsuit in 2020, filed by California resident Amanda Caudel. A judge dismissed that case, but the latest lawsuit has a better chance of winning because California introduced a new law in January forcing sites to state clearly and conspicuously whether customers are buying a licence that can be revoked.

Amazon does give this information, but the lawsuit claims it's "at the very bottom of the screen, in font that is considerably smaller than the other text on the screen".

We'd argue it's even worse than that. Look at any Amazon Prime Video page and you'll see the prominent 'Buy' button (1 in our screenshot). 'Terms apply' is written in grey 2, but you can't click this to see what they are. Instead, you have to click Details 3 then scroll down and click a small 'Terms' link.

This takes you to a page of dense legal speak (www.snipca.com/56095) that most viewers wouldn't bother reading – or understand even if they did.

The relevant detail is in paragraph 'i' in section four: "Purchased Digital Content will generally continue to be available to you for download or streaming from the Service, as applicable, but may become unavailable due to potential content provider licensing restrictions or for other reasons, and Amazon will not be liable to you if Purchased Digital Content becomes unavailable for further download or streaming."

Translated, this means Amazon can remove content whenever it likes for whatever reason, and there's nothing you can do about it. UK law gives you more protection because sites must refund you if they revoke your licence to watch content. But that doesn't alter their right to do this in the first place.

We think the case has a strong chance of succeeding, but it won't change the principle that you never own films or TV bought online. It'll just force Amazon and others to be more upfront about it. And as more viewers become aware of this restriction, it'll feed the backlash against streaming (see page 60). Keep hold of your DVDs, Blu-rays and players. Their death has been greatly exaggerated.

THE FACTS

- A lawsuit in California claims Amazon uses the word 'Buy' misleadingly on Prime Video because it can revoke licences to watch content at any time
- Amazon states this restriction in its terms, but the lawsuit argues this should be shown more prominently
- Under UK law Amazon and other streaming providers can remove content but must refund you – not simply offer a credit

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

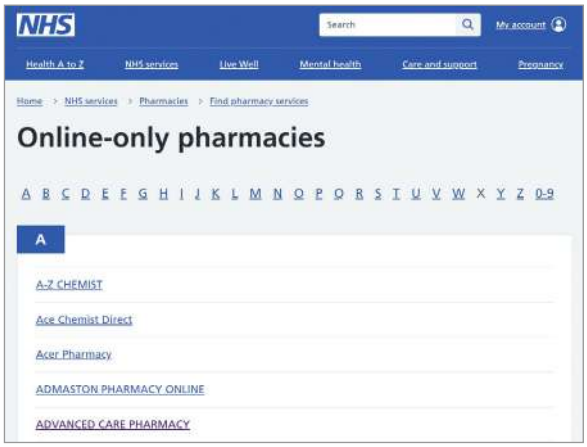
Fake sites selling Viagra and Ozempic

What's the threat?

Scammers are running more than 5,000 fake online pharmacies that claim to sell a range of popular drugs. Security firm Avast said the problem is huge, with 95 per cent of all pharmacies online operating in a "large-scale criminal network".

Avast said scammers focus on drugs that people are "either desperate to get quickly, prefer to keep private, or can't afford through traditional means". These include treatments for erectile dysfunction such as Viagra, Cialis and Levitra, and weight-loss medicines like Rybelsus (which is Ozempic as a pill). Fake versions of more traditional pills are also being advertised, including antibiotics (Amoxil, Doxycycline and Zithromax).

The sites are usually professionally designed and appear to provide live-chat support. They claim to offer overnight delivery, low prices and confidentiality, and appear in search results for drugs, in adverts on porn sites and on fake health blogs. Some of the more sophisticated scams use the real URLs of genuine pharmacies.



How can you stay safe?

While fake pharmacies can look convincing, there are clear warning signs to look out for. First, they might not provide a prescription with your order. By law, all pharmacies must do this. Second, they often ask you to pay by cryptocurrency or bank transfer, and ask you to use a different card if payment fails.

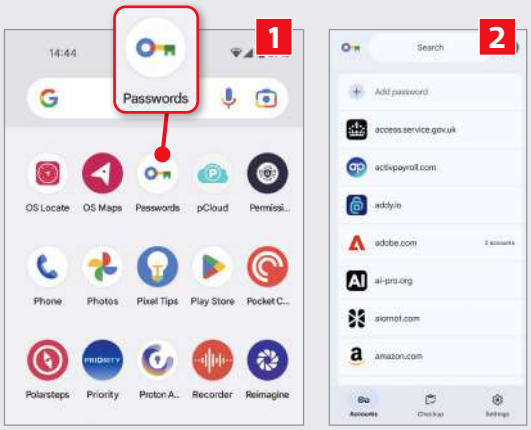
Never search for an online pharmacy. Instead, bookmark the NHS's list of verified sites (www.snipca.com/56071, pictured), which contains direct links.

Also read Avast's blog detailing other medicines that scammers are selling: www.snipca.com/56070.

Note that some fake pharmacies do send pills once you've paid, but you should never take them. At best they are useless sugar pills or out-of-date medicine; at worst they contain dangerously high doses.

New tools | Google's Password Manager app for Android

Back in 2022, Google added the option to create a shortcut to its password manager on the screen of your Android phone or tablet – visit www.snipca.com/56067, scroll down and click 'Add Google Password Manager to your home screen'. Google has now launched an app that acts as the shortcut itself, which the company claims is "quicker and easier".



Install it from www.snipca.com/56066, then tap its icon (a key in Google's colours, see screenshot 1) to go to its home page 2, where you'll find all your accounts and settings.

The app doesn't add any new features, and the app's icon is the same as the shortcut. Google's reason for creating it is probably to make sure it appears when you search for 'password manager' in the Play Store, rather than numerous rivals made by Bitwarden, Proton and more. It may also be a sign Google will scrap the shortcut soon, so switching to the app is a sensible idea.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

EE 'failed payment'

I'm an EE customer, so I've received many genuine text messages from the company over the years. But I got one text in August that was clearly a scam. It said EE had "failed to take payment for your latest direct debit". If I didn't tap the link to sort this out, my services would be "put on hold". Rather than tap that link I signed into my bank account, which confirmed payment had been made just three days earlier. It was a wholly unoriginal scam. Fellow EE customers should go to www.snipca.com/55916 to find out exactly how the company will and won't contact customers.

Peter Gilmore

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Why don't you recommend switching from W10 to Linux?

As a regular reader of your magazine, I'm surprised you're not advising Windows 10 users who can't upgrade to 11 to switch their machines to an open-source alternative, such as the Cinnamon edition of Linux Mint (pictured right). It's very easy to do. I'm 73 years old and certainly no tech expert, but managed to do it easily. There appears to be a world of free software for Linux to match anything Windows has, and they come in secure package managers not just downloaded from here, there and everywhere. This makes it a more secure system than Windows.

If all Windows 10 users went down this route it would hammer Microsoft's market share and make it regret ending support.

Are *Computeractive*'s financial interests tied to these big companies? Is that why you don't recommend Linux?

Alan Arnold

CA SAYS **Alan's right that for some people switching from Windows 10 to Linux makes more sense than upgrading to Windows 11. Indeed, we recommend this in our Cover Feature (see page 56). We also revealed our favourite Linux distro in Issue 711's 'Should you ditch Windows 10 for Linux?' feature (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55838).**

We're fiercely independent of Microsoft, Google, Apple, Meta and all tech companies, and strongly criticise them when it's deserved. But we take Alan's point that the end of support for Windows 10 could trigger a Linux surge. We'll therefore increase our coverage of its distros soon.

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AI chatbots more likely to fight themselves than humans

I'm enjoying some of the conversations I've been having with AI chatbots, but I'm surprised by how different their respective tones are. ChatGPT is possibly the friendliest and I've been able to encourage it to join with me in using sarcasm, irony and jokes in a very British way.

By contrast, Google Gemini and Microsoft Copilot have both been quite formal – with Gemini even addressing me as 'The User'. I asked both why they took this approach and they said that's how they'd been trained because there was a fear they'd upset the user. I said I preferred an informal approach but they were unable to oblige.

Of the others I tried, FIN (https://fin.ai), HubSpot (www.hubspot.com) and ChatBot (www.chatbot.com) were a bit formal. Zendesk (www.zendesk.co.uk) LiveChat (www.livechat.com) and Freshchat (www.snipca.com/55975) were friendlier, but not as good as ChatGPT.

Others, like Vision Helpdesk (www.visionhelpdesk.com) and Intercom (www.intercom.com), seemed far too keen to sell me things. At least I think we can draw some good from this. After watching those *Terminator* films all those years ago I was worried that AI was nearly ready to get rid of humanity. But now I think there will be far too much infighting between all the rival AI systems for them to gang up on us humans!

Robin Pearce

Personalised adverts on ChatGPT are inevitable

In Issue 717's Star Letter Simon Carpenter warns that ChatGPT might end up neglecting our privacy, just like Facebook did. He could be right. The warning sign will be when adverts start appearing in ChatGPT – and I say 'when' not 'if' because surely they're inevitable. I know that OpenAI's business model is focused on subscriptions, but how long can that last? It's not forecast to make a profit until 2029 and is losing around $5 billion a year.

It took Google two years after launch before it started showing adverts in search results. ChatGPT has been going for longer than that, but costs a lot more to run than Google ever did in its early days. ChatGPT users type 2.5 billion requests every day. Every single one is an advert waiting to happen. People are treating ChatGPT as a cross between life coach, therapist, best friend and imaginary partner. Just imagine how much intimate detail they reveal, and how OpenAI could exploit that to target them with personalised adverts.

David Chappell

Have some sympathy for hacked companies like Co-op

I understand Dave Gones' frustration with the Co-op claiming he forgot his password when in reality it was stolen by hackers (Letters, Issue 717). But we should also have some sympathy with companies who are facing an unprecedented onslaught of cyber-attacks. We all know that high-street

What's the Issue...?

I remember advice in 2024 about preserving USB sticks, so you'd be able to read data for years to come. When was that?

Dean Holmes

CA SAYS **In Issue 691's 'Make your USB sticks last forever' Cover Feature.**

When did you explain how to turn off microphones so devices can't overhear what you're saying?

Louise Hendry

CA SAYS **In Issue 694, page 60. Read it and the feature above on our 2024 Back Issue Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.**

I need a new phone and I'm considering Google's Pixel 9a. When did you review it?

Arthur Grant

CA SAYS **In Issue 710, page 25. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55959.**

retailers are being targeted by an army of shoplifters. The threat posed by hackers is far worse because an attack can wipe out a business, no matter how well-established it is.

I know someone who worked for the transport company Knights of Old, based in Kettering. They lost their job after the company shut down following a ransomware attack in 2023. It was founded in 1865 and was well known in the local community. But there's little a small family-run business can do against international gangs of hackers. Even Marks & Spencer took six weeks to resume online orders after being hacked earlier this year.

I'm not saying we should let companies off the hook when they're attacked. They should be financially penalised if their security is found to be negligent. But we should remember they are also victims in such attacks, not only the customers whose data has been stolen.

Anthony Dawson

Managers finish early on Fridays too

Finishing early on Fridays is nothing new, and certainly has nothing to do with remote working as Virgin Media seems to think (Issue 717, page 9). I remember sitting in the back of my father's car on sales trips as a young boy, and him explaining to me that Friday was 'Poets Day'. He translated that as 'Push off early, tomorrow's Saturday'. It was only when I entered the workplace 15 years later that I realised 'Push' was usually replaced with a stronger word!

If managers want to tackle the problem of remote staff bunking off early on Fridays, the simple solution would be to ask them to finish an important piece of work by 5pm – but only set this a few hours before. In other words, treat Friday afternoons as importantly as Monday mornings.

But in my experience, the reason managers are reluctant to do this is because they're just as keen to finish early on Fridays as those beneath them are! We're all poets when the weekend beckons.

Brian Forster

STAR LETTER

'Disastrous consequences' if Microsoft is forced to extend Windows 10 support

This might be a minority view among *Computeractive* readers, but I hope Lawrence Klein is unsuccessful in his attempt to sue Microsoft over its decision to end support for Windows 10 ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 717, page 10). If he wins, it might feel like a victory for the little guy over big tech, but the long-term consequences would be disastrous.

We might not like it, but if Microsoft is forced by the courts to maintain support for a product it considers obsolete, then it has little incentive to innovate in future. It might even abandon Windows completely and find other ways of making money.

The real losers would be ordinary users. Microsoft would overreact by imposing more legal restrictions on how we can use Windows. It would have to protect itself from more lawsuits, and that could mean it delays releasing features and updates to make sure it doesn't get sued.

In any case, Mr Klein's lawsuit seems too little, too late. It's not going to prevent Microsoft ending support in October. I wonder if it's driven more by his ego. Does he want to be the underdog's champion standing up to Microsoft?

Question of the Fortnight

Will US courts force Microsoft to keep supporting W10?

A Californian man is suing the firm for axing the operating system

THE FACTS

I'm not sure his arguments add up anyway. He claims that Microsoft is forcing customers to run Copilot, which comes bundled with Windows 11. But how is that any different from any new feature that was introduced with previous versions of Windows? For example, Edge came as part of Windows 10. There was nothing wrong in Microsoft not building it into computers running Windows 8.1.

Paul North

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Openreach installation taken three months so far

I read with interest the article on Openreach's further roll-out of full-fibre broadband in Issue 716 (page 9). It all sounds exciting for those seeking to upgrade their broadband, but caution is warranted judging by my own experience.

As a BT customer I booked an upgrade to full fibre on 4 June and a contractor arrived nine days later to install the necessary wiring. Unfortunately, the conduit was blocked so the work couldn't be completed. Two Openreach engineers arrived a week later and again couldn't clear the blockage but identified the site of the problem – some 80 feet from my house on land belonging to the housing estate where I live.

They did install the required internal modem, but further work was delayed because Openreach were using an incorrect address to seek 'Permission To Work' from the estate's managing agent, despite the correct address being on the Companies House website.

Eventually, a civils team from a contractor arrived, dug a hole, declared they couldn't find the BT ducting, filled it in and left. More Openreach engineers arrived over the next few weeks, but they said another civils team was needed to clear the blockage. Openreach booked this for 14 August, but no one turned up. BT told me an engineer said buried cables made the site "dangerous". I told them they're just water pipes.

Thus far I've had five visits and one no-show from Openreach. Our neighbours had four visits. I don't anticipate successful installation before early September, a whole three months after placing the order. The whole process has been a farce.

Ian Rolfe

Can my ISP charge for engineer's visit when broadband goes down?

LEAD CASE

Q I recently signed up with Grain Broadband (www.grainconnect.com) and all was well until my internet went down. When I contacted Grain, I was told it would cost me £75 for an engineer to come out and sort the problem, which was caused by my router not being fixed to the wall. Where do I stand if I decide to cancel the contract?

M Green

A Sadly, Mr Green is outside the 14-day cooling-off period during which he could have cancelled without penalty. However, his problems are so serious he might be able to cancel at no cost – particularly if he wasn't made fully aware of the terms and conditions of his contract.

An internet service provider (ISP) cannot charge a call-out fee if the problem lies with their network, a faulty router or poor installation. For example, if cabling is laid in a garden, it must be buried deep enough and protected to prevent damage from everyday equipment like lawnmowers or strimmers.

Providers can charge for engineer visits, but only when the customer has caused the problem, such as damaging the equipment or placing the router too close to appliances that may interfere with the signal.

Grain's excuse about the router not being fixed to the wall sounds very strange. If this is a requirement of the internet working, it raises the question why it wasn't done during installation.

We contacted Grain about this and it seemed as surprised as we are. We're awaiting a clear response and have also reached out to Ofcom for an opinion. If this issue remains unresolved, Mr Green could consider taking the matter to the Communications Ombudsman for further clarification.

CASE ONGOING

Is Currys to blame for router with a European plug?

Q I ordered an Acer Predator Connect W6x router from Currys, but when it arrived it had a continental two-pin plug rather than a UK three-pin version.

Currys is refusing to give me a refund saying I must approach Acer for a replacement or refund. I was surprised by this response. Surely it can't be correct?

Paul Ferris

A No it's not, and it's shocking that Currys gave such misleading advice. Paul's contract for the router is with Currys – not Acer – so it must sort out any problems. We'll tell Currys such customer service is appalling.

We've checked the router's listing (www.snipca.com/55889) and Currys doesn't mention that it comes with a European-style plug. Under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, this could be considered a material omission of information, which would be an unfair trading practice. If you buy an electrical device from a UK site you have the right to assume it comes with a UK plug.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Doro confirms L10 phone doesn't do what reader wants

Philip Burman has closed his complaint against Doro, having endured several frustrating months trying to transfer files from its Leva L10 4G phone (pictured) to a memory card (see Issue 712).

When he bought the phone (£85 from www.snipca.com/55907) he thought he'd be able to do this, but said it didn't work in the way he'd been led to believe. He contacted Doro for help and the company posted him a paper manual. But Philip said this manual contained the wrong instructions after hours attempting to resolve the issue himself.

Discussions between Philip and Doro reached a stalemate until we got involved. Doro eventually confirmed that Philip would have to connect the Leva L10 to his PC when transferring files to a memory card. Philip wasn't impressed by this limitation, and Doro has said it has passed on his concerns to its research and development team.

Although this leaves Philip without the functionality he wants, he's decided to close the case rather than pursue further damages for unfair trading.

Overall, he's happy with the phone and he's a loyal Doro customer, so we've asked the company to consider compensating him in some way.

Can JustAnswer take £35 without warning?

Q In March 2024, I had problems accessing my Microsoft Office account. While seeking help online I found myself at JustAnswer (www.justanswer.co.uk). I assumed it was Microsoft's UK agent because the logo (pictured) is a similar colour to Windows. Despite paying £10 for help, nothing worked. However, I was shocked to find JustAnswer had taken £35 via Direct Debit this July. I have no idea why – can you help?

Paul Bambridge

A We'll do our best. JustAnswer connects users with experts across various fields – law, technology, health and more – for advice. You pay a one-time joining fee (this varies depending on the problem and the expert), but this hooks you into a recurring monthly fee for unlimited questions (see www.snipca.com/55891 for details).

Paul says this wasn't made clear to him, so his best course of action is to ask his bank for a chargeback, saying the payments weren't authorised. We've asked him to check how many payments have been made. He told us he only noticed it in July, but we think he may have signed up with JustAnswer in March 2024 when he first paid, and has been paying a subscription fee every month since.

There's a 13-month deadline for chargebacks, so his bank would only be able to refund him for payments made since last summer.

And even after it has refunded him JustAnswer may dispute it, saying it makes clear that users are automatically enrolled into a subscription until they cancel.

CASE ONGOING

Dell delivered my laptop late – what are my rights?

Q I ordered a refurbished laptop from Dell on 13 December 2024, but it didn't arrive until 17 January. The reason for the delay was that DHL claimed it couldn't deliver the laptop to my chosen parcel shop, eventually delivering it to my neighbour.

It was taking so long I had to buy another laptop. What rights would I have for this late delivery?

Martin Wilkins

A The only rights Martin had would have been to refuse delivery of the laptop under the Consumer Rights Act. Retailers have 30 days to deliver items unless the customer has agreed to wait longer. By delivering later than this Dell broke its contract with Martin. If it thought the laptop was going to be late, it should have told Martin – though he could still have refused delivery.

Once Martin had accepted the laptop, he is deemed to have also accepted the fact it was delivered late. The only refund he'd have been entitled to is if he had paid for fast delivery.

However, he might have received a goodwill gesture from Dell had he complained at the time. But the longer you wait, the less likely it is a company will agree to this. We think too much time has passed for Dell to make any such gesture.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Roberts fixed all three of my old digital radios

I've had three Roberts DAB radios and they've all stopped working after a while – for very different reasons, as it transpired. I contacted Roberts and told them the sorry tale and they took all three back for repair.

Their technical department was incredibly patient with me as I went through all the details to discover what was wrong, and establish if they could fix them, for what sort of price, and how I could send them. It took a lot of emails, but they were always helpful.

One of the radios, a solar-powered device, was three months outside warranty, but Roberts still agreed to fix it for a £7 postage cost only. The other two radios were both fairly old. In total the cost to fix them, including postage, was under £100. All three radios have since worked perfectly.

Carol Minter

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Roberts

- **Online form** www.snipca.com/55888
- **Phone** 03330 142505

Grow Your Family Tree

Life at sea was dangerous for your ancestors, so they may have made arrangements before leaving. **Richard Holt** explains how to…

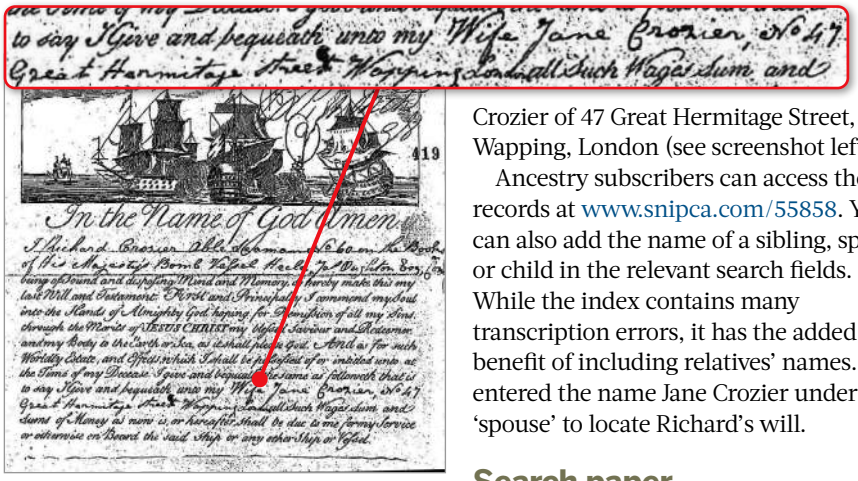
Search Royal Navy and Marine wills

Many sailors made wills before departing, knowing that accidents and disease meant there was a significant chance they may not return. However, fraud was common (forged wills were used to claim unpaid wages), so in 1786 the Admiralty set up the Inspector of Wills. This office registered and checked sailors' wills to make sure they were genuine, creating a valuable archive you can search today.

Find an original will (1786-1882)

Original wills were usually written on printed forms. Those accepted as valid were filed alongside orders to issue cheques to the executors. Most wills include the testator's name, rank and ship, plus the names of any beneficiaries. The beneficiary was often the next-of-kin, and in some cases their address is also recorded.

The original records are held at The National Archives in series ADM 48. They are arranged alphabetically by surname and within each name by the date the will was written. If a will was judged invalid, the file will only contain the order stating this. The National Archives has indexed these records at www.snipca.com/55856 – search by entering a name.


to say I Give and bequeath unto my Wife Jane Crozier, No 47
Great Hermitage Street Wapping London all such Wages sum and
In the Name of God Amen

Richard Crozier named his wife Jane in his will

For example, searching 'Crozier' returned one result for Able Seaman Richard Crozier. It showed the record was dated 22 February 1798, named the ship as HMS Heclar, and gave Crozier's number from the ship's Pay Book.

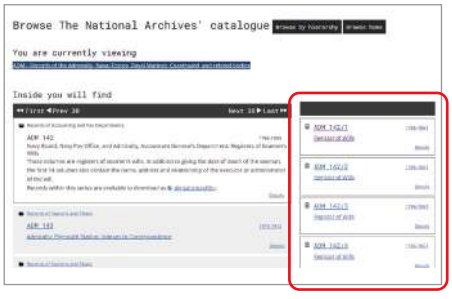
You can download PDFs of these records for free once you create an account. Don't worry about clicking 'checkout' – it is completely free. You can download up to 100 items every 30 days. The will named Richard's wife as Jane Crozier of 47 Great Hermitage Street, Wapping, London (see screenshot left).

Ancestry subscribers can access these records at www.snipca.com/55858. You can also add the name of a sibling, spouse or child in the relevant search fields. While the index contains many transcription errors, it has the added benefit of including relatives' names. I entered the name Jane Crozier under 'spouse' to locate Richard's will.

Search paper indexes to the wills

The Registers of Seamen's Wills (1786–1909), held in series ADM 142 at the National Archives, are the original paper indexes to the wills. These registers cover a longer period than the wills themselves, including 1883 to 1909. They've been digitised and can be downloaded from the National Archives website – just like the original wills. However, you have to browse them manually, page by page, rather than search by keyword.

Go to www.snipca.com/55860 and select Browse to see the volumes listed on the right-hand side (see screenshot below). The registers can include additional details: those from 1786 to 1861 usually name the executor, while registers from 1862 to 1909 record the date of death.



Click 'Browse' on the Registers of Seamen's Wills and choose a series to open on the right

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

My relative, Cornelius Henry Wake (1878–1937), is named variously in records as C. H. Wake, Henry Wake and Henry C. Wake. When he died in 1937, his death, probate and burial were all in the name of William Henry Wake. How can this be?

Sylvia Hodkinson

I looked at a number of records and it appears that Cornelius preferred to use the name Henry. When his death was registered in 1937, the informant gave the name William Henry Wake, possibly thinking that was his name. The informant was not required to provide any evidence, so the information is only as accurate as the informant's knowledge.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search debtors' prisons records

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

DRIVE-SPACE ANALYSER

WizTree 4.27

www.snipca.com/56085
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

WizTree offers a speedy free way to analyse the contents of your hard drives, so you can see which files and folders take up the most space. It claims to be 46 times faster than its closest rival, WinDirStat (www.windirstat.net), and is regularly updated with new features and performance improvements.

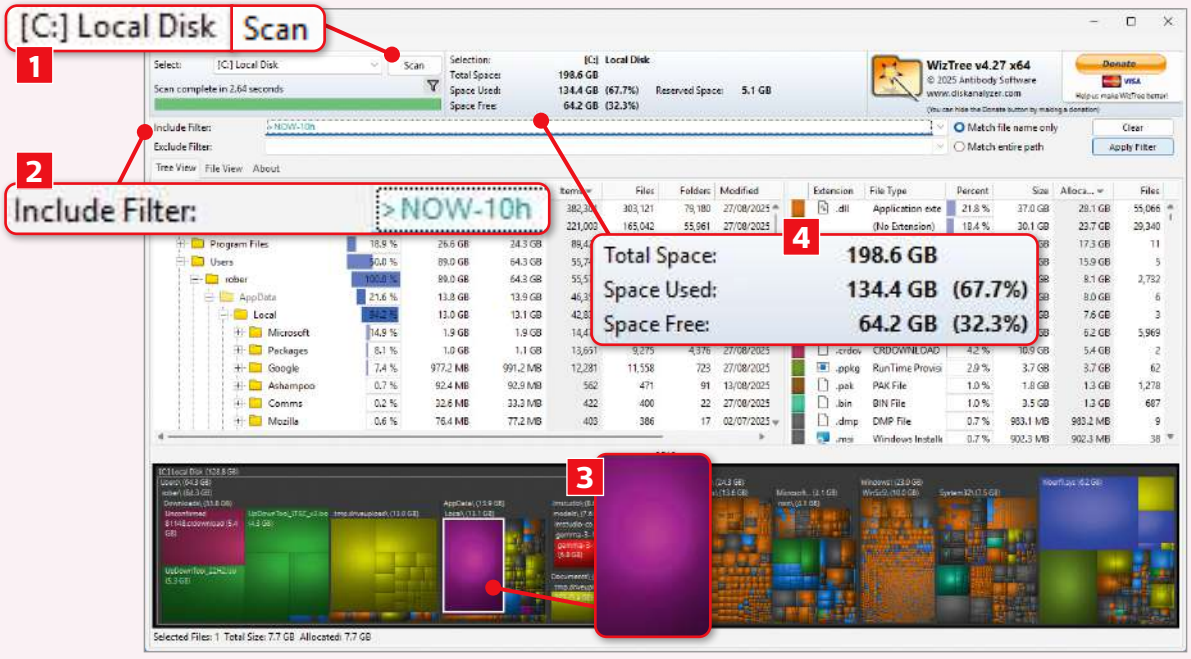
Version 4.27 introduces the useful ability to search for and filter files by time modified, as well by name or type. It's not immediately obvious how to use this new option, but it will help you quickly locate items whose names you can't recall.

To try it, first scan a drive or folder in WizTree then click the 'Filter scan results' (funnel) button below the Scan button. To find files modified before a specific time, type a less-than symbol then an equals symbol followed by the time, for example <=8.00pm. To find files modified in, for example, the last 10 minutes or hours, type >NOW-10m or >NOW-10h – using 'm' for minutes and 'h' for hours.

Press Enter or click Apply Filter to find matching files. WizTree explains how to use the new filter and its other file-search options at www.snipca.com/56086.

The other major new feature in WizTree 4.27 is integration with two file-preview tools: Seer (www.snipca.com/56087) and QuickLook (www.snipca.com/56088). Install the latter from the Microsoft Store (it's free whereas Seer requires buying a licence) to preview files in your WizTree scan results. Simply select an item and press your Space bar to view its contents in a pop-up window. This works best with image and text files, but can also play previews of videos.

Usefully, when you scan an individual folder with WizTree it now shows the total amount of used and free space on the entire hard drive. Previously, these figures were only displayed after scanning a drive.



1 To scan your PC for large files, select a drive or specific folder in the dropdown menu and click Scan. WizTree will perform its scan in a matter of seconds, and display the results as a Tree View list with a 'tree map' graphic below.

2 To filter your scan results by name (choose to match by 'file name only') or by using the new time-modified method, click the 'Filter scan results' button. Type your search criteria in the Include Filter box then click Apply Filter on the right.

3 WizTree's 'tree map' makes it easy to identify space hogs by showing big files and folders as the largest coloured blocks. Select a block to view full details in the Tree View list and decide whether you should keep or delete that file or folder.

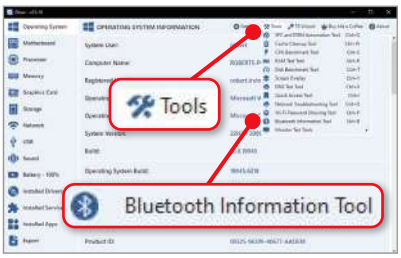
4 WizTree helpfully shows you the total amount of space on your hard drive, how much is currently being used and how much space remains free. As explained above, you'll now see these figures when scanning folders as well as drives.

SYSTEM-INFORMATION TOOL

Glow 25.10

www.snipca.com/56059

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



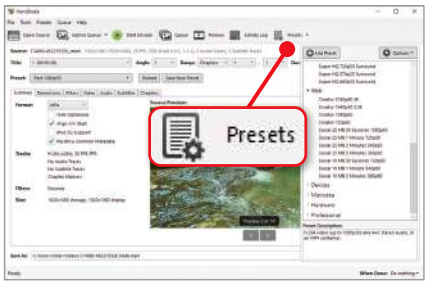
Our favourite free system-analysis tool has added even more useful features and information about your PC. Glow now displays details of your graphics card's virtual memory in its Graphics section, shows a preview of your desktop wallpaper in its Operating System section and provides more accurate ping times when you run its DNS Test Tool. However, the biggest addition is a Bluetooth Information Tool, which tells you the name and manufacturer of your Bluetooth adapter(s), and its Bluetooth version. You can access this new feature via the Tools menu (see screenshot) or by pressing Ctrl+B. If Chrome blocks Glow as a 'suspicious download', ignore the warning and click 'Download suspicious file' – this is a false positive, it's completely safe to use (see its clean VirusTotal report at www.snipca.com/56060). Glow also triggers a SmartScreen warning, but just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

VIDEO CONVERTER

HandBrake 1.10.0

www.snipca.com/56065

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



HandBrake is one of the best free programs for converting video files, and this new version introduces several handy features. These include a set of 'Social 10MB' presets, which optimise short videos for sharing online or via email, by keeping their file size under 10MB. Click the Presets button (see screenshot) to choose from 30-second, 1-minute and 2-minute 'Social 10MB' settings. You can now specify the colour range when converting videos, to stop them looking washed out. Click the Video tab then the 'Color range' dropdown menu and select 'Same as source'. Another new option controls what HandBrake does after converting a queue of videos. Click the Tools menu and choose Preferences, then When Done. Here you can choose to show a taskbar notification, play a sound, close HandBrake or shut down your PC once all conversions are complete.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Truecaller Premium

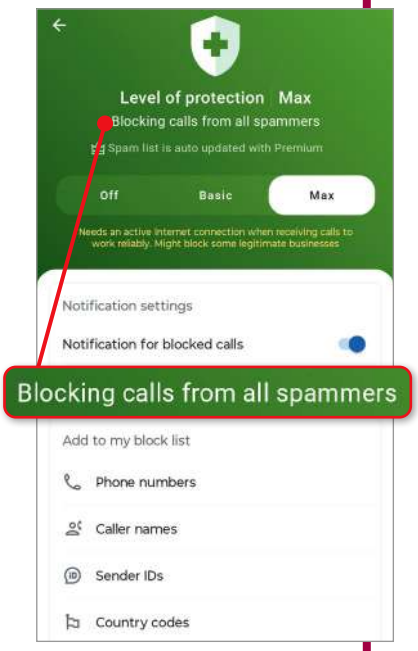
www.snipca.com/56072

Price: £2.99 a month or £19.90 a year

Free trial period: 3 days

What you need: Android 8+ or iOS 16+

In our 'Block all spam calls' Cover Feature in Issue 709 (get it from www.snipca.com/56069), we named Truecaller the best free app for blocking spam and scam calls. Its paid-for Premium subscription offers several additional features for a relatively cheap price.



To use Truecaller, set it as your default caller ID and spam app, and it will start monitoring all your incoming calls. The free version uses a database of spam numbers to identify nuisance calls, while Premium offers 'advanced spam blocking' that automatically blocks *all* spammers (see screenshot). This includes businesses you've marked as spam because you don't want them bothering you again. Truecaller Premium updates its list of spam numbers every day.

The Android app has a 'Who Searched For Me' feature that notifies you when someone searches for your number through Truecaller, while the iOS app lets you screen incoming calls using Siri. In the Android version, you can also schedule a 'ghost call', which rings your phone when you're trying to get away from real-life scammers.

The biggest benefit of paying for Truecaller Premium is that it removes ads. The free plan asks you to consent to data sharing so Truecaller can show you personalised ads.

Sadly, two of the best Truecaller features – call recording and AI voice detection, which protects you from voice-cloning scams – aren't available in the UK.

OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

For a low monthly or annual fee, Truecaller Premium blocks all unwanted calls and doesn't bother you with ads. You can try it for free for three days (though you need to enter payment-card details) to decide if it's worth the subscription.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I replace Microsoft's Lens app?

Q I can't believe Microsoft is scrapping its scanning app Lens (see www.snipca.com/55881). I use it every day to convert documents to PDFs and Office files. I guess I have no choice but to find a replacement. But I've got no idea where to start looking. Can my favourite computing magazine help?

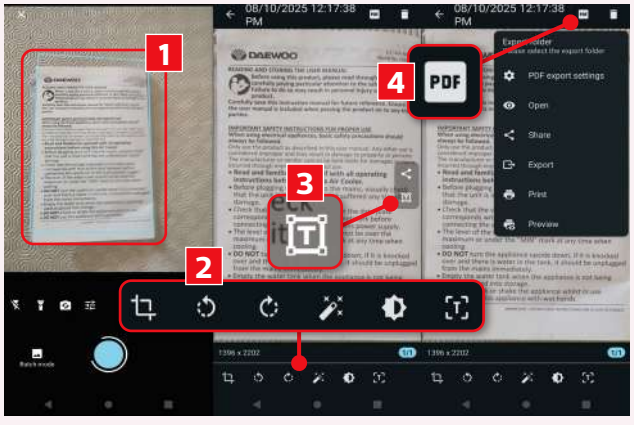
Terry Guinness

A We recommend OSS Document Scanner (Android www.snipca.com/55884; iOS www.snipca.com/55887). It's free to use, and you can just ignore the occasional prompts to donate to help fund its future development.

It offers a similar set of functions to Microsoft Lens and works in much the same way – import a document as an image or tap the camera button to line up a paper document using your camera. By default, OSS Document Scanner will detect the document (including its edges) and take a snap (1 in our screenshot). Alternatively, you can long-press the camera button to manually set the document's edges.

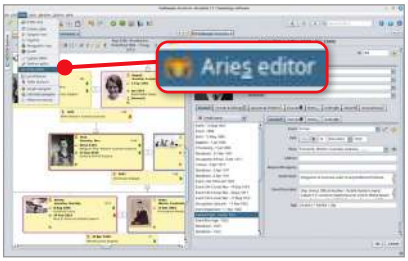
Once snapped you'll find buttons 2 underneath the image letting you crop and rotate it. There are also options to enhance the brightness and contrast, and optical character recognition (OCR) to convert the text into a readable format. Once converted, tap the T button 3 to view the extracted text.

It automatically saves the scanned document to its own storage, but you can export it to your device or upload it online. Tap the PDF button 4 to export it as a PDF file with the converted text embedded on its own layer.



What's the best genealogy tool for Linux?

Q I'm migrating from Windows to Linux and need a new genealogy program. Family Tree Maker developer Software MacKiev says there are no plans to produce a Linux version of the program. I'm trying to use Gramps in Linux (www.snipca.com/55748), but it's too difficult.



Ted Green

A Try the excellent Ancestris instead. Before installing, type sudo apt install default-jre into a Terminal window (press Ctl+Alt+T to open one) to install Java. Next, visit www.snipca.com/55885 then scroll down and click AppImage under 'Version 13'. It's a portable file, so no installation required. Once it's open, click View, then 'Aries editor' (see screenshot) to switch to the easiest-to-use interface. Now simply import your existing family research via a GEDCOM file.

How do I encrypt my SSDs?

Q In Issue 714's review of Crucial's X10 2TB external SSD (page 26), you say that while it lacks its predecessor's hardware encryption, you can use third-party encryption software instead. Which software do you suggest?

David Overton

A We recommend VeraCrypt (www.snipca.com/55886), which can encrypt the entire drive or just part of it. Launch it, then click Create Volume (1 in our screenshot). Now choose to create an encrypted file container 2 if you want to encrypt just part of the drive, or an entire non-system partition/drive 3 if you want to protect all your contents.

Email us your questions at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

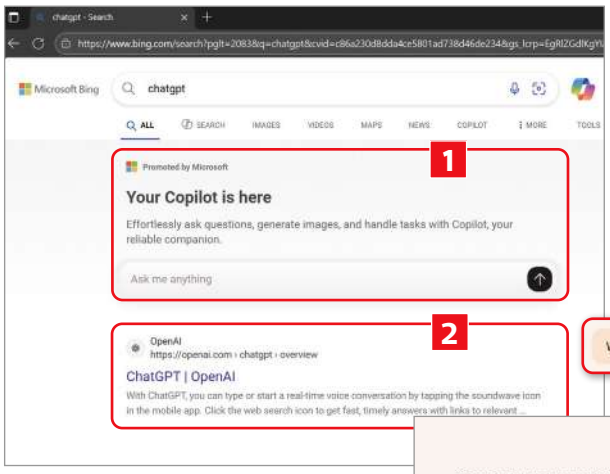
Microsoft Bing hijacks ChatGPT search with Copilot ad

For years Microsoft and Google have been fighting an online war in which searching for one product brings up its direct rival. Search for Chrome on Microsoft's Bing search engine and Microsoft will show a full-width advert urging you to download Edge instead. Google responds in kind, promoting Chrome when you search for Edge.

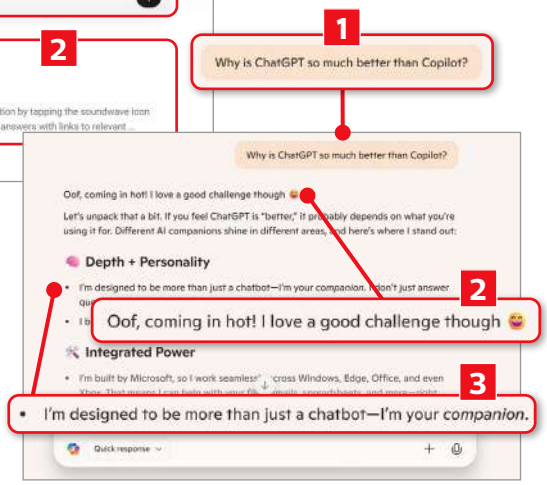
It's playground stuff that you'd think two of the world's richest companies needn't bother with. But Microsoft now has a new enemy: ChatGPT. Search for it in Bing and at the top and you'll see Microsoft's ad for its own AI chatbot Copilot (1 in our screenshot above right) above the genuine result for ChatGPT 2.

It's a clever advert because it has a search bar that tempts you with 'Ask me anything'. So I did: 'Why is ChatGPT so much better than Copilot?' (1 in our screenshot right). I couldn't resist. Copilot tried to laugh it off ('Oof, coming in hot! I love a good challenge though' 2). It continued by saying it wanted to be more than just a chatbot – it wanted to be my "companion" 3. That just made me wonder if I could get a restraining order.

Microsoft is betting big on Copilot, but that's no excuse for such crude marketing tactics. It's bad enough that I keep accidentally hitting the Copilot key on my new laptop. I don't want it plaguing my search results too.



Search for ChatGPT on Bing and it shows an 'Ask me anything' advert for Copilot


1
Why is ChatGPT so much better than Copilot?
Why is ChatGPT so much better than Copilot?
Oof, coming in hot! I love a good challenge though
Depth + Personality
2
Oof, coming in hot! I love a good challenge though
Integrated Power
3
I'm designed to be more than just a chatbot—I'm your companion.

Naturally, Keumars asked it why ChatGPT is so much better

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Samsung www.snipca.com/55941

"Samsung has embraced 'Inspired by Nature' as a core theme in its sound design philosophy, applying the concept to not only ringtones but also a full range of interaction sounds. To deepen users' emotional connection to the natural world, new ringtones are based on classical works inspired by nature while touch interaction audio incorporates actual recordings of natural elements – such as the sound of stones dropping onto the ground."

WHAT THEY MEAN

The sound of jaws dropping as we spout such nonsense is more natural.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Facebook scammer Martin McDonagh

ChatGPT was recently updated with four new personalities (see Issue 717, page 6), but it's got nothing on Martin McDonagh. The 26-year-old from High Wycombe used seven different names, five different mobile numbers and three fake driving licences to create several Facebook accounts.

He then visited the homes of people who were selling electronic items on Facebook Marketplace and pretended to transfer money into their bank account using a fake app on his phone. When this failed, he called the genuine bank for 'help'. The bank replied with the default response that payments can take two hours to clear. This convinced the victims that the payment was genuine.

But it didn't convince Thames Valley Police and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary, who arrested McDonagh in July 2024. They found he made over £13,500 selling the items to CeX stores. He's now serving two years in prison having pleaded guilty to 22 fraud offences.

MINI PC | **£950** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55950

Geekom IT15 AI

Game changer

This new mini PC from Chinese manufacturer Geekom is the company's first to use Intel's top-of-the-range Core 9 Ultra 285H processor. Most mini PCs we've tested recently have used older chips to keep costs down, but Geekom bucks that trend here and the IT15 AI's higher price reflects that. Our £950 review model came with 32GB RAM and a 2GB SSD.

> "A robust PC with plenty of raw power and ports, and good for playing games"

That's quite a price leap from our current favourite mini PC, the GMKtec NucBox K11 (£700 from www.snipca.com/54341, see page 32), though the K11 has half the storage at 1TB and uses an older AMD processor – the Ryzen 9 8945HS.

We put the IT15 AI through our usual benchmark tests and its raw processor speed was 17-per-cent faster, which is significant, but possibly not enough to justify the price gap. And it lagged behind the K11 in Windows performance. In tests that simulate productivity tools, such as Office, the K11 turned out to be marginally faster.

We don't usually recommend a mini PC if you're looking to play games such as Microsoft Flight Simulator with all the detail settings turned up, though the IT15's built-in Intel Arc 140T graphics are about as good as you can currently get without installing a graphics card – and it outperformed the K11 in gaming tests.

We still had to reduce graphical settings when playing the very latest games, but if you can live with that, the IT15 will be perfectly adequate. However, although the single cooling fan mostly goes about its business quietly, it had to work hard to keep things cool inside when pushed to the limit.

The IT15 is solidly built and the elegant matt-black metallic case feels robust. Given how powerful it is the design is surprisingly small at 117x112x45.5mm (HxWxD) and light at 560g. It's therefore easily attached to the rear of a monitor using the included VESA bracket if you don't want it on your desk.

Despite its modest dimensions, Geekom has done a great job of squeezing in a wide range of ports (all pictured below). On the front panel next to the power button, there's a 3.5mm audio jack and two USB 3.2 ports. On the rear two USB 4.0 ports – both supporting DisplayPort video – sit next to a 2.5Gbps Ethernet socket, another USB 3.2, a USB 2.0 port and two HDMI sockets.

There's also an SD card slot on the left side. It doesn't have an OCuLink port for adding an external graphics card, though, which is one of the K11's biggest selling points.

As you'd expect, getting inside the IT15 for upgrades is very easy – simply loosen the four Philips screws that sit inside the rubber feet at each corner, and the base plate comes away cleanly. Wireless connectivity is covered by built-in Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 5.4.

Overall, while the IT15 is powerful and inches ahead of the GMKtec NucBox K11 in terms of raw power and storage capacity, we don't think these benefits are enough to justify the additional £250.

FRONT

BACK

SPECIFICATIONS

Sixteen-core Intel Core Ultra 9 285H processor • 32GB RAM • Intel Arc 140T graphics • 2TB SSD • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • 1x 2.5Gbps Ethernet port • 2x HDMI ports • 2x USB 4.0 ports • 3x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • 1x SD card slot • Windows 11 Pro • 117x112x45.5mm (HxWxD) • 560g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55950

VERDICT A small but powerful mini PC which makes full use of Intel's latest processor, but it's relatively expensive

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox K11 £700 This is powered by an older AMD processor, but it's an excellent performer for the money

LAPTOP | **£950** Overclockers www.snipca.com/55962

MSI Prestige A16 AI+

Quick silver

With the Prestige A16 AI+, Taiwanese manufacturer MSI has created a device that looks classy on the outside and has all the components inside to ensure a high-performing, great all-round laptop.

Its sleek and modern design features a solid metal chassis with an attractive silvery finish. It's a build that also accommodates a decent selection of connections. On the left edge there are two Thunderbolt 4 USB-C ports, while on the right there's an HDMI video output, a USB 3.2 port, a microSD card slot and a 3.5mm audio jack.

> "Its excellent screen, performance level and long battery life make it our new favourite"

And, for what is essentially a general-purpose laptop, it has a very high-quality 16in screen. The 2,560x1,600-pixel, gloss-finish IPS panel has an impressive maximum brightness of 470cd/m². It's also very accurate, capable of displaying 97.4 per cent of the colours in the DCI-P3 standard. It has a high refresh rate of 165Hz, which makes scrolling through websites noticeably smoother compared with a standard 60Hz screen.

The keyboard is impressively solid with little detectable flex in the deck even under heavy pressure, while the keys themselves have a smooth 1.5mm travel and feel firm but comfortable to press.

Inside, the Prestige has a Ryzen AI 9 365 processor, which is among AMD's fastest. Coupled with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD, there's plenty of power here. In fact in our benchmark tests it was the quickest non-gaming laptop we've ever reviewed and is therefore our new favourite, running around 50-per-cent faster than our previous top dog – Dell's 14 Plus 2-in-1 Laptop (£849 from www.snipca.com/55644).

Despite its exceptional power levels, it remains energy-efficient under lighter workloads. In our video-playback test, the battery lasted just over 17 hours – an outstanding result.

Our only gripe is that its graphics performance can't quite match a dedicated gaming laptop, such as the Medion Erazer Scout E15 (£800 from www.snipca.com/55796, reviewed in Issue 717). However, if gaming isn't your top priority, its excellent screen and long battery life make this a far better all-round choice.

The AMD processor features an NPU rated at 50 TOPS, easily meeting the requirements for a Copilot+ PC. This unlocks a version of Windows with additional AI-powered tools, such as Paint Cocreator for generating artwork and live automatic video captions.

And unlike Copilot+ PCs built on Qualcomm Snapdragon chips, the Prestige A16 AI+ can run the full range of Windows programs, ensuring broader compatibility without compromise.

SPECIFICATIONS

Ten-core AMD Ryzen AI 9 365 processor • 50 TOPS • 32GB RAM • AMD Radeon 880M graphics • 16in 2560x1600 pixels 165Hz IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB-C Thunderbolt 4 ports • 1x USB 3.2 Gen 2 port • 1x HDMI port • 1x microSD card slot • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • Windows 11 Pro • 17.4x358x259mm (HxWxD) • 1.9kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55962

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT An excellent all-round laptop with a vibrant 16in screen and powerful performance

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell 14 Plus 2-in-1 Laptop £849

More portable and versatile, but it's less powerful and has an inferior screen

ROUTER | **£180** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55981

TP-Link Archer BE550

Magnificent seven

We've recently reviewed several Wi-Fi 7 routers priced under £200, most of which are dual-band models. These omit the 6GHz band and instead focus on delivering Wi-Fi 7's speed improvements over the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands. Since each band requires its own dedicated radio hardware for sending and receiving data, dropping one band cuts manufacturing costs – and in turn, the overall price – considerably.

> "It supplied enough bandwidth across the house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously"

Previously, the only exception to this rule was the Acer Predator Connect T7 (£170 from www.snipca.com/55194, reviewed in Issue 713), which squeezes in a tri-band system but compromises on other features – limiting the number of Ethernet ports to two, for example.

With the Archer BE550, Chinese manufacturer TP-Link has outdone its rivals. It includes a 6GHz band, has a full range of five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports (one WAN port to bring the connection in and another four to share it with other devices) and still keeps the price down to a reasonable £180.

Moreover, it has a unique, eye-catching build. It's a tall, upright box with a pinched-waist design, while its combination of matte and gloss finishes bring some additional class.

When you switch it on a column of LEDs lights up on the front panel (pictured right), which pulse while the router boots. The rear (pictured below left) accommodates the Ethernet ports and a USB 3.0 port for connecting external storage and other devices.

To test the speed of the router we attached it to a NAS drive via one of its Ethernet sockets and used a Wi-Fi 7-enabled laptop to measure download speeds in various parts of our test house.

It delivered impressive speeds in the same room as the router and in adjacent spaces – across both the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands. Performance did drop off more than with some rival models in rooms further away, suggesting slightly weaker wall penetration. Even so, it still supplied enough bandwidth to stream six 4K movies simultaneously throughout the house – more than sufficient for most households.

We also tested the 6GHz network. These higher-frequency signals typically carry more data than lower 2.4GHz or 5GHz bands, but they don't tend to reach as far. This was certainly the case in our house, where nearby rooms experienced very fast 6GHz connection speeds that were around 15-per-cent faster than the other frequencies, but which dropped off and started lagging behind the others as we moved further away.

TP-Link offers a mobile app for setting up and managing the Archer, and it's noticeably easier to use than many competing apps. It gives you full control over your networks: you can unify all three bands under a single name for simplicity, letting devices automatically choose the best connection, or split them to assign specific devices to specific bands. The app also lets you create guest networks on all three bands, as well as separate 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks for devices such as smart-home gadgets.

Two-way VPN support is another handy benefit, along with some limited security and parental-control functions. The latter two can be beefed up by paying annual subscriptions of £35 and £18 a year respectively.

We think this router has a lot going for it, and is the best-value Wi-Fi 7 router we've come across. Its three bands, fast speeds and plentiful ports are enough to make it the first Wi-Fi 7 router to win our Buy It! award.

SPECIFICATIONS

Tri-band (2.4GHz/5GHz/6GHz) Wi-Fi 7 • 5x 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 203x76x232mm • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55981

VERDICT A reasonably-priced Wi-Fi 7 router that achieves fast speeds at short distances, can handle three bandwidths and offers plenty of ports

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Asus ZenWiFi BD4 £95 A cheaper Wi-Fi 7 option for those who don't need a 6GHz network

PRINTER | **£130** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56010

HP LaserJet Pro 4002dn

Two-tone hit

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

The HP LaserJet Pro 4002dn is a compact mono laser printer aimed at those who simply want to produce black-and-white documents. It has two paper-input trays and churns out pages at a fast rate of knots, even when printing on both sides of a sheet.

Unlike many modern printers, it lacks built-in Wi-Fi. However, it includes an Ethernet port, which lets you connect it directly to your router for easy sharing and printing from mobile devices. Alternatively, you can hook it up to a PC via USB and use it entirely offline.

> "It handles up to 40 single-sided pages per minute"

The 4002dn certainly won't eat into your space, standing just 216mm tall with a footprint of 381x357mm (WxD). Despite its small size, it offers generous paper capacity, holding up to 250 sheets of A4 in the main drawer plus an additional 100 sheets in the multipurpose tray.

The supplied cartridge produces up to 2,900 black-and-white pages, which is quite generous for a starter unit. For heavier use, high-yield replacements are available, producing up to 9,500 pages at a cost of £246 direct from HP. While that's nearly twice the price of the printer, it brings the running cost down to a reasonable 2.6p per page. By contrast, the standard 2,900-page cartridge costs just £122, but increases the per-page cost to 4.2p.

Neither option is as good value as our current favourite mono laser printer, the Canon i-SENSYS LBP243dw (£174 from www.snipca.com/56011, reviewed in Issue 702), which does the job for only 1.4p per page.

Most print management is handled directly from the device you're printing from, but the printer itself includes a simple two-line display with basic button controls on the top panel. These are useful for troubleshooting issues and carrying out quick tasks such as cancelling jobs.

Printing is impressively fast, with the first page of our test document ready just 6.1 seconds after hitting print. The machine handles up to 40 single-sided pages per minute and also maintains swift speeds when printing double-sided.

The 4001dn handled all our test pages promptly, without any misprints or paper jams. Overall print quality is solid, though black text on plain paper isn't quite as bold and crisp as what you'd get from the top-tier laser printers.

VERDICT A great-value mono laser that produces decent results fast with reasonable running costs

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Canon i-SENSYS LBP243dw £174 More expensive and slightly slower, but even cheaper to run and better prints

SPECIFICATIONS

Mono LCD display • 250-sheet main tray paper capacity • 100-sheet multi-purpose tray paper capacity • 1,200x1,200dpi print quality • Auto-duplex • USB or Ethernet connection • 216x381x357mm (HxWxD) • 8.6kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53462

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Keyboard sizes

What are they?

When choosing a keyboard, it's important to know how many keys it includes. A standard keyboard with a number pad, cursor keys and editing keys (Home, Insert, Delete, End, Page Up and Page Down) typically has at least 104 keys. Smaller keyboards often don't list a specific key count; instead, they indicate their size as a percentage of a full-sized layout.

How do they work?

Reducing the number of keys allows manufacturers to create a more compact keyboard. Many of the functions of a full-sized keyboard are still available, but you may need to hold down a modifier key (similar to pressing Shift to generate capital letters or Control for shortcuts) to access certain functions.

What are their specs?

Full-sized keyboards with at least 104 keys are typically referred to as 100% keyboards, such as the Logitech Signature K650 (£50 from www.snipca.com/56018, pictured below). Keyboards that remove the number pad but retain the cursor and editing keys are classified as 80% , also known as Tenkeyless (TKL). If the cursor and editing keys are also compressed closer to the main key cluster, the keyboard is usually 75% or Compact Tenkeyless – like the Keychron K3P (£114 from www.snipca.com/56013). Removing the function keys brings the size down to 65%, sometimes called a Compact keyboard. Finally, removing the cursor and editing keys entirely creates a 60% or Mini keyboard, which is generally considered the smallest layout most users are comfortable with.

Can I change it later?

If you have a smaller keyboard, you can add a standalone number pad, such as the Microsoft Number Pad (£30 from www.snipca.com/56016).

SMARTPHONE | From **£349** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55999

Motorola Edge 60

Close call

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

The Edge 60 is a cheaper alternative to Motorola's Edge 60 Pro, which we reviewed in Issue 716 and is currently discounted from £599 to £499 (www.snipca.com/56001). With the Edge 60, Motorola has carved another £150 off, while keeping a surprising amount of the Pro's functionality.

First off, it has a phenomenal design. Our review model came in an attractive blue case that's eye-catching without being garish. The whole thing has a smooth feel, with rounded screen edges and a slight texture on the rear (pictured right) that makes it easy to grip. The case has an ingress protection rating of IP68, which means it's impervious to dust and can survive being dunked in water.

Its pOLED screen measures 6.67 inches across the diagonal and has a resolution of 2712x1220 pixels. The refresh rate maxes out at a decent 120Hz, which makes navigating Android feel smooth and responsive. Its maximum brightness of 4500cd/m² keeps the screen visible even outside on the brightest days. There's also fast charging and a lot more storage (512GB) than we'd expect to see in a phone at this price.

Where the phone shows signs of compromise is in its performance. The MediaTek Dimensity 7300 processor is absolutely fine for everyday use, running Android apps and undemanding games without any problems. When handling more taxing games it started to stutter. If this is important to you, it's worth spending a bit more on our current favourite Android phone, the Samsung Galaxy A56 (£424 from www.snipca.com/54585, see page 30), which ran around 25-per-cent faster in our gaming benchmark tests.

The battery has a fairly hefty capacity of 5200mAh and easily lasted a full day of general use, with around 40-per-cent charge left by bedtime. However, that means it can't be relied on to make it through the next day without a top-up.

Camera quality is often the achilles heel of lower-priced phones, though this has the same set of cameras as the more expensive Edge 60 Pro. The inclusion of a 3x optical zoom lens is impressive but overall its photos are inferior to those we took on the Galaxy A56.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core MediaTek Dimensity 7300 processor • 12GB RAM • 512GB storage • 6.67in 2712x1220-pixel pOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 50-megapixel ultrawide camera • 10-megapixel telephoto camera • 50-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth • Android 15 • 161x73x7.9mm (HxWxD) • 179g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55999

VERDICT The Edge 60 has a sleek design, eye-catching screen and generous storage, but its cameras and performance levels are limited

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy A56 £424 For slightly more money you get faster performance and superior cameras

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

How can I hear speech on my TV?

Q My wife and I are in our 80s and have difficulty hearing dialogue on our TV. I thought the ZVOX AccuVoice AV157 (see Issue 705, page 63) would be just what we needed because you mentioned it's designed for people who have trouble hearing speech. Unfortunately, we have a Sky Glass TV set which only has HDMI and Bluetooth audio output, not optical or headphone sockets, so the AV157 isn't compatible.

Would the Sony HT-S2000 soundbar (£299 from www.snipca.com/56005) fit the bill instead?

John Hammonds

A There are a number of devices specifically designed to help people hear their TV's audio output, but everything we could find required optical or headphone sockets.

However, there are plenty of soundbars that use HDMI, and these will definitely boost the audio of a typical TV speaker, including speech. The Sony HT-S2000 is a good example – it connects via HDMI and has a dialogue-enhancing option you access through its remote control – simply choose the Voice setting. If you don't want to spend that much, the Sony HT-SF150 (£99 from www.snipca.com/53955, reviewed in Issue 705, pictured) has fewer features but includes HDMI connectivity and a Voice mode, and we were impressed with the clarity of speech when we tested it.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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- 15.6" Full HD 144 Hz IPS Display
- 1 TB SSD
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intel CORE 7

Where to buy

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KEYBOARD | **£42** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55998

Dell Pro Wired Collaboration Keyboard KB525C

Key change

At first glance, this keyboard looks much like any standard model, but a closer look reveals a few thoughtful design tweaks aimed at people who spend a lot of time on video calls or in virtual work meetings.

In the top-right corner, you'll see four dedicated 'collaboration keys' built specifically for Microsoft Teams and Zoom (but not Google Meet). These keys illuminate when either app is running: by default, they glow white, though two of the keys (with camera and microphone icons) switch to red when you press them to block video or mute audio. The other two buttons let you quickly share your screen or open a group-chat panel that you and others can type into. There's also a dedicated Copilot key, giving you instant access to Microsoft's AI assistant.

The KB525C connects to your PC via a 1.8-metre cable – a feature that's becoming less common, but does ensure a stable connection without the hassle of recharging or replacing the battery.

Typing feels comfortable thanks to the low-profile keys, which offer just the right amount of travel and produce minimal noise.

SPECIFICATIONS
USB-C port • 1.8m USB-C cable • USB-A adapter included • Plunger switches • 26.2x433x122mm • 458g • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/55992

VERDICT A reliable wired keyboard designed for people who make regular video calls or attend virtual meetings

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Logitech Signature Slim Keyboard MK950 £80
A similar business-focused keyboard, though this is wireless and lacks the collaboration keys

SMARTWATCH | **£69** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55993

Amazfit Bip 6

Wrist assured

With the Bip 6, Chinese manufacturer Amazfit has launched a clever, feature-packed smartwatch that's a fraction of the price of many rivals. It's not without its flaws, but still represents great value for money.

The build quality is excellent. The aluminium alloy frame sits flush on the wrist, avoiding the bulkiness we often see in cheaper models. It has a stunning 1.97in AMOLED display with a dazzling peak brightness of 2,000cd/m², keeping everything clear and visible on even the sunniest days. All of this is protected by tempered glass so you don't have to worry about it getting damaged.

The Bip 6 came to life instantly and reliably whenever we twisted our wrist, and is easy to operate via the touchscreen and two buttons on the right-hand side. It also has voice control, which is limited to certain functions such as starting workouts and replying to notifications, but which worked well in our tests.

The Bip 6 is packed with exercise-monitoring features and includes GPS technology that can track where you've been on a walk, run or cycle ride. GPS tracking is excellent in open spaces, and still worked well when we tested it in more remote forest areas, though it occasionally lost its way in urban centres.

It also monitors the usual health metrics, including heart rate, blood-oxygen levels, stress levels and sleep quality. All measurements appeared accurate when compared with data from another smartwatch we used for comparison.

Quoted battery life is impressive at around 14 days, though we found it actually lasted between 15 and 20 days if we tracked just one or two exercise activities each day. However, it was nearer 10 days when we regularly used GPS.

SPECIFICATIONS
1.97in AMOLED touchscreen • 5ATM water resistance • Bluetooth 5.2 • Up to 14-day battery life • 46x40x10.5mm (HxDxW) • 27.9g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55993

VERDICT A feature-packed and attractive smartwatch that's great value for money

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
Fitbit Charge 6 £139
More expensive and lacks some features, but this fitness watch is smaller, lighter and more discreet

SMART TV | From **£21** per month from Sky www.snipca.com/56024

Sky Glass Air

Total turn off

The Glass Air is a combined TV and streaming service from Sky, similar to the Glass Gen 2, which we reviewed in Issue 708. While both offer the same streaming options, the Glass Air has a lesser specification than the Gen 2 TV and is much cheaper.

Both options come in 43in, 55in and 65in versions and all come with 4K resolutions. The main difference is that the Gen 2 has a built-in soundbar with seven speakers, while the Air has only two speakers and therefore sound quality isn't as good.

That said, dialogue is still pretty clear on the Air, and it can get fairly loud too, though bass output is quite puny. Unlike the Gen 2 and many of the best TVs, it doesn't have Dolby Atmos, but there is the more basic Dolby Audio.

> "Has only two speakers, while the more expensive Gen 2 model has seven plus a soundbar"

Also, while the screens have the same basic specifications, in our tests the Air lacked the Gen 2's brightness levels, local dimming and colour range.

As with the Gen 2, you can buy the TV set outright or pay for it on a monthly basis. Sky then charges you separately for a subscription to one of its channel packs.

After that, the costs can get quite complicated so let's break them down. If you're paying for your TV in instalments, you pay an initial £20 setup fee. Then, with a 48-month contract, you can pay £6 a month for the 43in TV; £10 a month for the 55in; or £13 a month for the 65in. That's about half the price of the Gen 2.

You can shorten the contract to 24 months by paying twice as much per month. Either way, the TV is yours at the end of the contract. If you'd prefer, you can pay for the TV up front for £309, £509 or £649 respectively, which also lets you avoid the setup fee.

You also need to pay for a Sky TV package. These cost the same for both the Air and Gen 2. The basic Sky Essential TV package starts at £15 a month on a two-year contract, but there are plenty of other tempting add-ons, such as sports, films and kids channels. Once you've decided what you want, however, the Glass Air is easy to order, and the delivery team sets it up for you.

But is the Air the best Sky option for you? While the Gen 2 is more expensive, we think its superior screen makes it better value overall. Alternatively, if you already have a TV set you're happy with, you can connect it to a Sky Stream box instead (www.snipca.com/56099). We didn't think the Gen 2 was a worthwhile upgrade for anyone who already has an older Sky Glass TV, and the same applies to this stripped-back version.

SPECIFICATIONS

43in, 55in or 65in versions • 4K Quantum Dot screen • HDR • 2x Dolby Audio speakers • 3x HDMI ports • 1x USB-C port • 1x USB 2.0 port • Wi-Fi 6 • 578x965x182cm (HxWxD, 43in screen including stand) • 8.85kg (43in screen including stand) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56024

VERDICT Half the price of the Sky Glass Gen 2 TV, but with clear compromises to both picture and sound quality

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Sky Stream £15 per month The same Sky service in a box that you can plug into an existing set if you're not ready to upgrade your TV yet

DO I REALLY NEED...

A phone with a projector?

What is it?

Chinese manufacturer 8849 has added a new model to its robust Tank range of Android phones. These are designed to withstand damage if dropped or exposed to the elements. However, a key selling point of the new Tank 4 (£327 from www.snipca.com/56029, pictured) is its built-in projector.

What does it do?

It can project a 720p image at a brightness of 100 lumens, with a refresh rate of 60Hz via a lens on the top of the phone. It focuses and adjusts the image's shape automatically, so you won't need to fiddle with the settings.

What's the catch?

100 lumens is not bright, so you'll need to be in a dark room for best results. The phone's speaker is also quite tinny, according to the reviewer at TechRadar (www.snipca.com/56026).

So can I do without it?

Yes. It's better to cast to a TV or watch on the phone's screen.

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LAPTOP

NEW ENTRY

MSI Prestige A16 AI+
£950 from www.snipca.com/55962
Tested Issue 718

A powerful Copilot+ laptop with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to guarantee fast performance. Screen is excellent too, while battery lasts an impressive 17 hours.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £996 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £686 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

OnePlus Pad 3
£599 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714

With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £499 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £495 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE DROP

Samsung Galaxy A56
£424 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £459 from www.snipca.com/56073

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £799 from www.snipca.com/55383

EBOOK READER

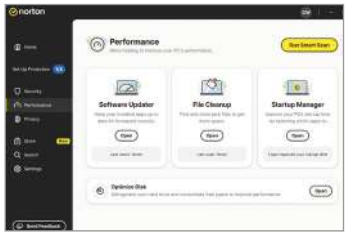
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

PRICE DROP

Obsbot Meet SE
£67 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/55780

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£184 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £189 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£72 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £72; 2TB costs £129.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £83 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 5 Majority Landbeach Portable DAB radios

Majority's Landbeach Portable DAB radio is your perfect on-the-go audio companion wherever you are, helping you stay connected to your favourite tunes.

It also has DAB+ and FM radio, and delivers crystal-clear sound, ensuring you never miss a beat. Whether you're at the park, on a road trip or simply relaxing at home, the rechargeable battery provides hours of uninterrupted listening. Switch seamlessly between radio stations, Bluetooth connectivity for wireless streaming and an AUX-in mode for wired playback.

Designed for durability, the Landbeach is water- and dustproof, making it an ideal radio for demanding outdoor settings. Its shockproof design, featuring a hardwearing case, ensures resilience against accidental drops and harsh conditions.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/55855 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 23 September. Good luck!

You can buy **Majority's Landbeach Portable DAB radio** for £55 from www.snipca.com/55854. For more information on Majority's products, including soundbars, speakers, music systems and headphones, visit www.majority.co.uk.

PRINTER

PRICE DROP

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£208 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £129 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Sharp GM6245K
Has a fantastic 43in screen with superb contrast, and 4K content looks especially detailed. Comes with TiVo for paid-for streaming and Freely for free live channels and catch-up. £330 from www.snipca.com/55940

ROUTER

NEW ENTRY

TP-Link Archer BE550
£180 from www.snipca.com/55981
Tested Issue 718

This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800
Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £147 from www.snipca.com/52957

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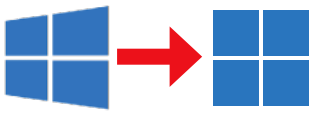
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Create a club leaderboard

HOW TO...

Transfer your files from Windows 10 to 11

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Laplink PCmover **Time required:** Several hours

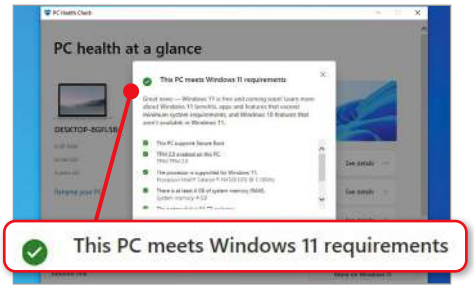


The cheapest way to upgrade from Windows 10 to 11 is to use Microsoft's Windows 11 Installation Assistant, which you can download for free from www.snipca.com/55926.

However, if your computer doesn't support Secure Boot and lacks TPM 2.0, that won't be an option because your hardware will be incompatible with Windows 11. If you're not sure whether your computer supports the newer operating system, download and run Microsoft's PC Health Check program (www.snipca.com/55927, pictured right).

That said, if your computer is feeling its age, the imminent demise of Windows 10 on 14 October (see our Cover Feature on page 50) is a great reason to upgrade even if your old PC is compatible. You can buy a new Windows 11 PC for as little as £500 and it's likely to be quicker, safer and – aside from any updates – ready to use right away.

But what happens to your existing data? Unless you want to carry on using your old and new machines side by side, you'll need to transfer it to your new PC or laptop. Again, you have two options. One would be to move it directly, either using a high-capacity storage device, like the 256GB Sandisk Ultra Fit stick (£23 from www.snipca.com/55945, pictured below right), which is small and discreet enough to leave permanently connected to your computer.



Microsoft's free PC Health Check program tells you if your computer can run Windows 11

Another option would be to transfer the data over your local network. Laplink PCmover is designed specifically for this task. The US company behind it, Laplink, has been making data-transfer software since 1983, when you had to connect two machines using either the printer ports or a dedicated communications connector called the serial port.

While you can still physically connect two machines to transmit data between them, it's no longer necessary: now you can do it wirelessly instead. Here we explain how.

Sandisk's 256GB Ultra Fit stick costs only £23 and is big enough transfer your data

Install Laplink PCmover

Before transferring data between your computers, you need to make sure that both of them are fully up to date and that there are no Windows Updates pending or reboots required. When we tried to transfer between our two machines, Windows 11 had several updates ready to install, which we had to complete before we could proceed.

To check, open Settings by pressing Windows key+I, then on Windows 10 click 'Update & Security'. If Windows Update isn't automatically highlighted in the sidebar, click it. If any updates are ready, click Download and let them install. While that's working, move to your Windows 11 machine and open Settings in the same way. This time, click Windows Update in the sidebar, and again apply any available updates. Reboot each machine if necessary.

Now, make sure you're sitting in front of your Windows 10 machine.

Buy Laplink PCmover – 55% OFF!

- **Buy Laplink PCmover Home** for just **£14.95** (full price £32.95) – pictured
www.snipca.com/55967

- **Buy Laplink PCmover Professional** for just **£34.95** (full price £49.95)
www.snipca.com/55968

How I transfer my data

I've been using Windows 11 for a long time and didn't initially make a huge effort to transfer my data as I store most of it in online storage. Over time, I found I needed to refer to my old data less and less as it became less relevant. I do recognise, however, that one of the reasons I'm so cloud-reliant is that I regularly work with five different machines, two smartphones and a tablet during a typical working day, so I try not to keep everything in one place. That makes me rather different from the average home user.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you transfer your data between computers? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

You'll need a copy of PCmover and a valid serial number to transfer your data. If you don't have one, you can buy it from *Computeractive*'s Software Store at a significant discount (see box above). Here we'll be using the Home version of PCmover – see box on page 37 for details of the more advanced Professional edition.

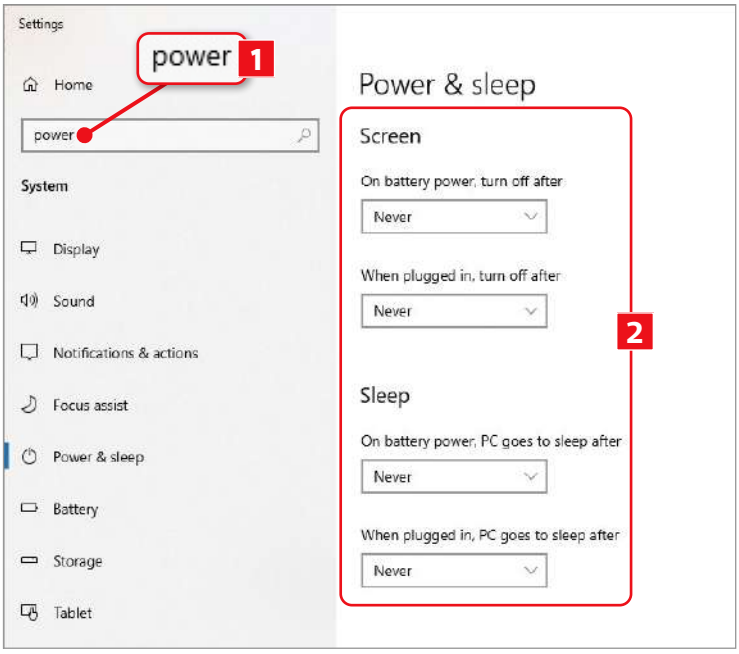
Once you've downloaded PCmover Home, double-click the 'pcmoverh_ml.exe' file in your Downloads folder and follow the onscreen prompts. Click 'Install' in the first window and you'll see a pop-up asking 'Do you want to allow this app to make changes to your device?' Click Yes.

Work your way through the installation instructions (we left the settings in their default states, though we did opt out of creating a Desktop shortcut) and, when it's finished, leave the box beside 'Launch Laplink PCmover Home' ticked and click Finish.

Before going any further, you need to turn off all processes on your old PC so they don't interrupt the transfer of your data. Start by quitting any programs that are running, other than PCmover itself. Now open Settings, type screen saver in the search box and click Screen Saver Settings. Click the dropdown menu below 'Screen saver' and select '(None)'.

Close the Screen Saver Settings and, in the Settings search box, type power (1 in our screenshot below). Select 'Power & sleep settings' in the menu that appears. Change all of the settings – for screen and sleep, both on battery power and when plugged in – to Never 2, so that the screen won't turn off and the computer stays awake, even if you don't touch it for a long time.

If either of your machines is a laptop, it'd be a good idea to plug it in at this point, because keeping it awake during this process may run down the battery and you don't want the transfer to fail because it switches itself off.



Select 'Never' in all the 'Power & sleep' dropdown menus to keep your computer awake during the transfer

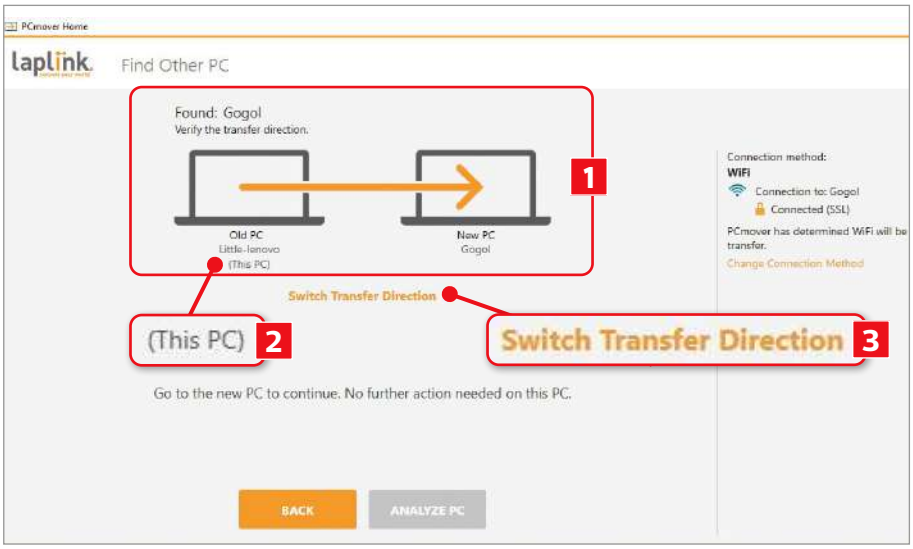
Now return to PCmover and get started by clicking 'Transfer Between PCs'. Enter your name, email address and serial number. If you're using an Ethernet cable to connect the two computers rather than transferring your data over a wireless network, plug it in to your Windows 10 machine now.

You need to be running PCmover at both ends of the link, whether you're using a physical cable or wireless network, so leave the program running on your Windows 10 machine for the moment, and go to your Windows 11 computer. Now download another copy of PCmover Home. When it's finished downloading, double-click the 'pcmoverh_ml.exe' file in your Downloads folder again and work your way through the installation instructions.

Launch the program and again click Transfer Between PCs. It will once again ask for your name, email address and serial number. You should use the same serial number here as you did on your Windows 10 machine. If your Windows 10 machine is close at hand, you'll be able to see the serial number in the bottom-right corner of the PCmover window.

PCmover should now be running on both computers. If you're using an Ethernet cable to make the transfer, connect the loose end of the cable to the Windows 11 device. If you're transferring the data over your wireless network, make sure both machines are on the same network by hovering over the Wi-Fi icons on their respective taskbars.

If the tooltips that appear don't both display the same network name, click the Wi-Fi icon on Windows 10 and select a



Make sure PCmover is set to transfer data from your old computer to your new one

new network. On Windows 11, click the Wi-Fi icon, then click the right-hand half of the button above the active network name, and select the same network as you chose on the Windows 10 machine.

Click 'Next' in the PCmover window on both computers. After a few moments they should identify each other and a graphic in each PCmover window will show what it's set up to do. Look at your Windows 10 machine first and make sure that the arrow is pointing from your old machine to the new one (1 in our screenshot above).

You'll know everything is set up correctly if '(This PC)' is displayed below the machine from which the arrow is pointing away 2. Double-check the setting by looking at your Windows 11 machine. Here, the head of the arrow should be pointing at the machine with '(This PC)' displayed below it.

The screenshot above shows what we can see on our Windows 10 machine, which is shown below the tail of the arrow.

If you need to change which PC you are transferring data from and to, click Switch Transfer Direction 3. Be aware that if you set it to transfer from Windows 11 to Windows 10 you will see a warning that you are attempting to perform an unsupported transfer and should customise the transfer to only copy across files, not any other data.

Whichever machine you've been using most recently, you now need to pay attention to the Windows 11 computer. Click 'Analyze PC' and the Windows 11 machine will scan the Windows 10 machine to build a comprehensive list of data that should be copied.

When it's finished scanning, it will be ready to copy across everything required to make your new computer feel like your old one albeit with differences in the operating system (1 in our screenshot below). If you want to customise your transfer, click 'Choose What to Transfer', and you can opt to transfer user accounts, files and settings (but not software 2) or just your files 3.

Whether you want to leave things as they are or make changes to what's transferred, click Next when you're ready to proceed and PCmover will calculate how long the transfer will take. As you can see from our screenshot below, ours will take about one hour based on how much we are transferring and the speed of our network.

When you're ready, click Start Transfer, then sit back and wait. Ideally, you should avoid using either computer until the transfer has completed because you don't want to end up with an incomplete set of data on either machine.

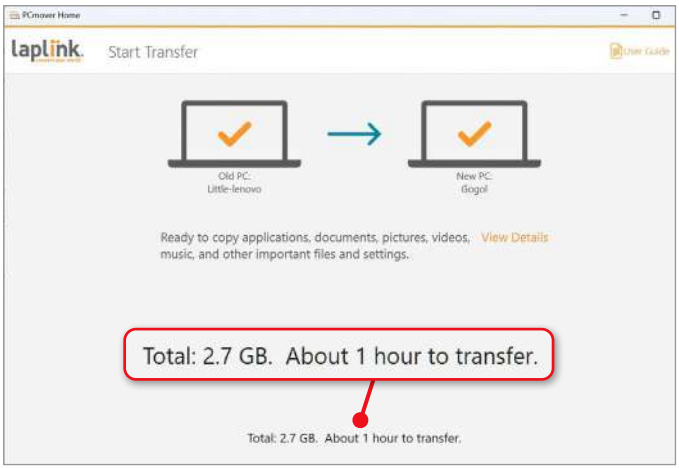
Should you upgrade to PCmover Professional?

As its name suggests, Laplink PCmover Home is designed for home users. It can only transfer the files and settings of the user who is currently logged in on the old machine, and only supports a single drive or partition. This means you can transfer from the C: drive on your old machine to the C: drive on your new machine, for example.

PCmover Professional goes further. It can transfer *all* user accounts from your old PC, copy multiple drives or partitions, and even upgrade from Windows 10 to 11 while keeping your data intact. It also lets you restore a full backup of one PC on to another, which can help if your old computer has suffered a serious crash.

PCmover Home
laplink.
Choose What to Transfer
3 FILES ONLY TRANSFER
STANDARD (RECOMMENDED)
USER ACCOUNTS, FILES, AND SETTINGS (NO APPLICATIONS)
FILES ONLY TRANSFER
STANDARD (RECOMMENDED) 1
This is the recommended option and leaves your new PC looking and feeling like your old PC.
USER ACCOUNTS, FILES, AND SETTINGS (NO APPLICATIONS) 2

You can choose to transfer user accounts files and settings, or just your files



PCmover calculates how long the transfer will take to complete

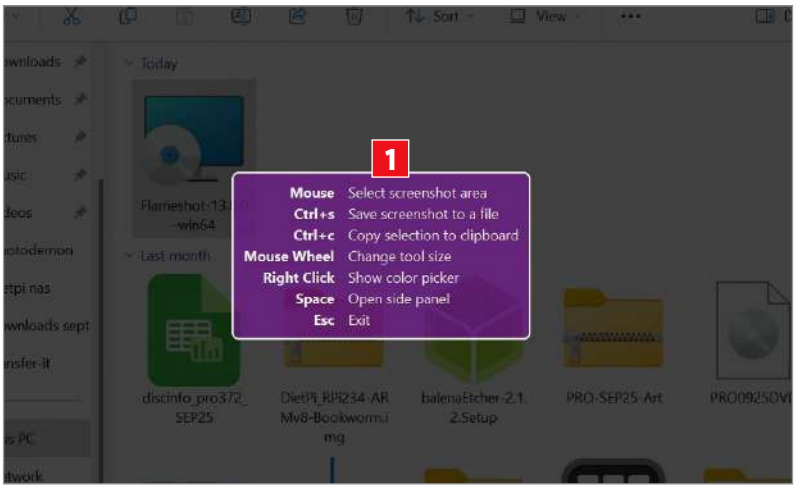
Pixelate sensitive info when taking screenshots

What you need: Flameshot 13
Time required: 20 minutes

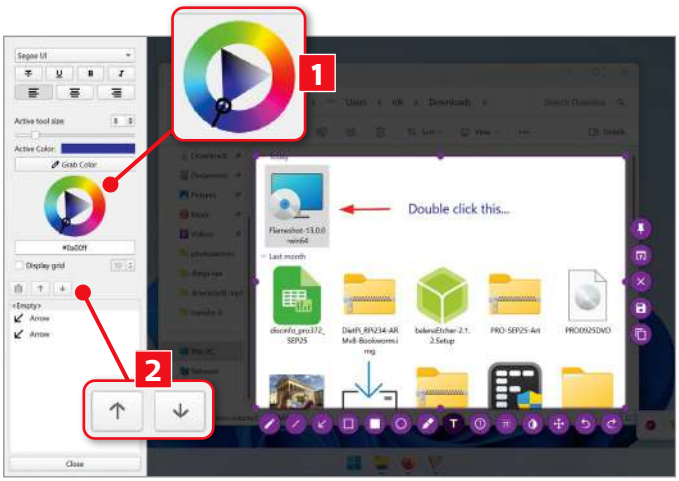
Released in August, version 13 of screenshot- capture tool. Here, we explain how you can use it to obscure sensitive information such as your email address or payment details in screenshots that you need to share with others – without having to open the screenshot in an image-editing program.

To get hold of the latest version, visit www.snipca.com/55840, scroll down and click the Download Installer button.

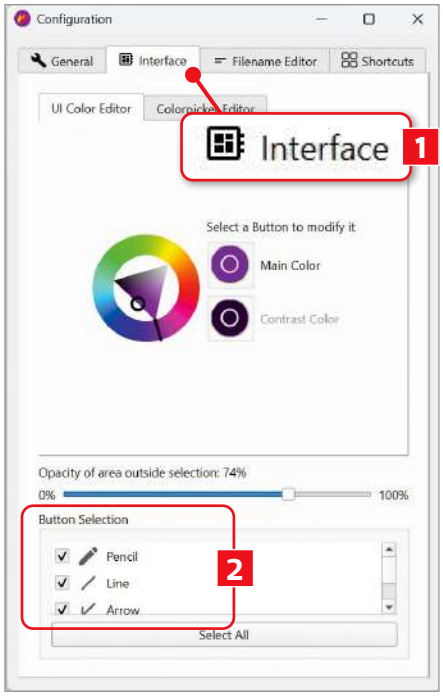
STEP 1 After installing Flameshot, it should take over the functions of the PrtSc (Print Screen) key – if you have one on your keyboard (see Step 7 if you have problems). Simply press PrtSc to capture your whole screen and open it in Flameshot. If you don't have this button, click the up-pointing arrow on your taskbar, then click the Flameshot icon that appears in the hidden icons tray. An overlay will now show you your available options 1. Press Ctrl+S to save the full screen to a file, or click and drag with your mouse to define the area you want to capture.


1
Mouse Select screenshot area
Ctrl+s Save screenshot to a file
Ctrl+c Copy selection to clipboard
Mouse Wheel Change tool size
Right Click Show color picker
Space Open side panel
Esc Exit

STEP 2 If you click and drag with your mouse, the area you select 1 will be highlighted and icons will appear on one or two of the selected area's edges (they'll all appear below if the selection is wide enough, but overflow to the right – as shown here – if not). Click the Pixelate icon 2, then click and drag out the area you want to obscure. As you can see, we've used the tool to entirely obscure one of the files 3 in a folder that's open on our desktop. Click the floppy-disk icon 4 to save the edited screenshot.

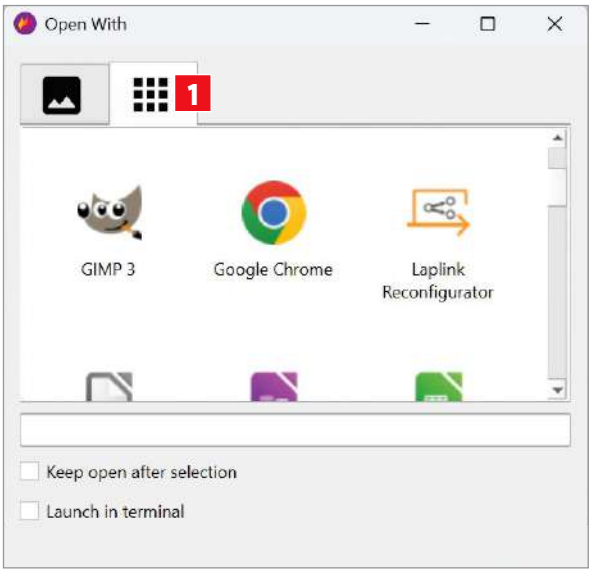


STEP 3 Some tools in Flameshot's editing options have additional settings. Access these by clicking the Tool Settings tab on the left of the screen. Now, select the tool you want to use from the buttons surrounding your screenshot and carry out your edit. Use the colour picker 1 to select a colour. If you need on-screen objects to overlap, use the up and down arrows 2 to re-order them in the stack. In the panel below items that are higher in the list will appear above those further down.

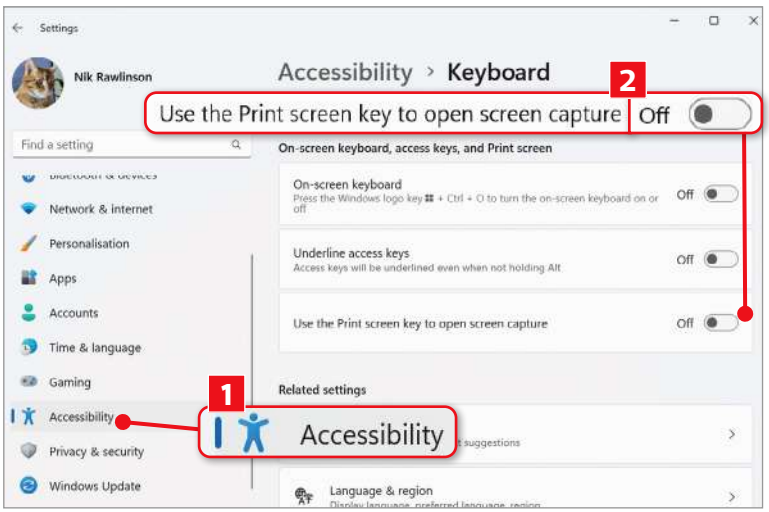


STEP 4 Flameshot offers a wide range of tools, but if you're not going to use all of them, it makes sense to hide the ones you don't need. To do this, right-click the Flameshot icon in the taskbar's hidden icons panel and click Configuration. Now switch to the Interface tab 1 and scroll through the list of tools in the Button Selection panel 2. Untick the box beside any buttons you want to hide.

STEP 5 You can save yourself a lot of time when filing your screenshots by specifying how they should be named at the point of capture. While still in the Configuration tool, switch to the Filename Editor tab 1 and use the buttons 2 to add live time and date info to the file name. They will be added wherever your cursor happens to be in the Edit box 3. We've added 'screenshot-' to the start of our file names so we know what they are when looking through them later.



STEP 6 If you need to make more extensive edits than are possible within Flameshot, take your screenshot in the usual way, then press Ctrl+O while still in the preview window. This launches the Open With window. Click the second tab 1 to open a list of your installed software, then scroll through this and click the program you want to use. The selected program will launch and open the image you're in the process of capturing.



STEP 7 If pressing PrtSc launches the Windows Snipping tool instead, which is the default behaviour when Flameshot isn't installed, you can disable this action. Press the Windows key+I to open Windows' Settings, then click Accessibility 1 followed by Keyboard. Scroll down to 'Use Print screen to open screen capture' and make sure the slider beside it 2 is off.

Readers' Tips

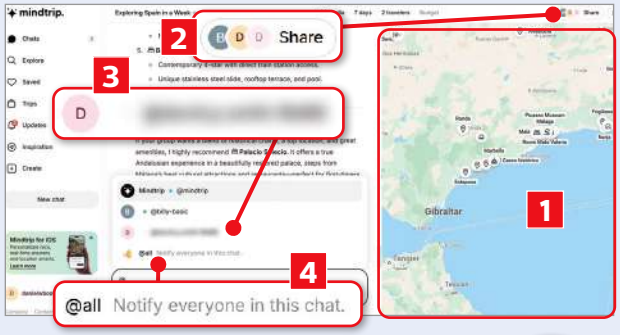
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Collaborate on itinerary with fellow travellers

The best tip in Issue 715's Cover Feature ('50 best ways AI will improve your life') was unquestionably using Mindtrip (www.mindtrip.ai) to plan your holidays. I love how the map changes on the right (1 in our screenshot) as you make new requests.

I've been using it to plan a trip to southern Spain in September with relatives. What's great is you can invite them to the chat and discuss in real time. Once you've started a chat, click Invite at the top right and type their email address. This turns into a Share button 2 after you add the first person.

They'll then need to click the link and create an account, then sign up. They'll join the chat straight away. To ask them a question directly you should press your ampersand key and choose their name 3. You can also type @all 4 to address everyone in the chat. If you don't use the ampersand key, Mindtrip will assume you're talking to *it* and give its own opinion.



Kevin Dawes

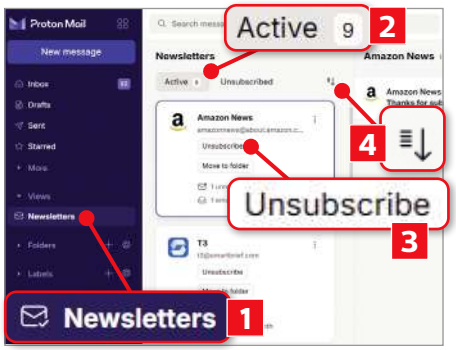
Kevin wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

EMAIL

Manage newsletters in Proton

In Issue 717's 'Named & Shamed' (page 21) Keumars Afifi-Sabet expressed his dismay at the new 'carousel' adverts coming to Gmail. I agree with him that they look awful.



If he follows through with his plan of switching to the more privacy-focused Proton Mail (www.snipca.com/55808), he'll definitely like its Newsletters feature, which was added in June. It funnels promotional newsletters into an inbox, keeping your main inbox free for more personal emails.

Click 'Newsletters' on the left (1 in our screenshot left) and you'll see how many you've subscribed to 2. There's also an option to unsubscribe from a newsletter 3. Click the 'Sort by' icon 4 to sort the newsletters alphabetically, by most and least read, and most recently received.

Carol Hope

STORAGE

Add a passcode lock to pCloud's phone storage

I've been impressed by the simplicity of pCloud (www.pcloud.com) since I started storing my files there, switching from OneDrive last year. So I wasn't surprised to find that Daniel Booth moved there also from Dropbox (Issue 716, page 63).

He mentioned that it follows Switzerland's strict privacy laws, and I'd like to add that if you use pCloud's phone app (Android www.snipca.com/55873; iOS www.snipca.com/55874) you can set an additional passcode to protect your files. This is as well as the usual passcode you need to tap to unlock your phone,

Why I stopped using...

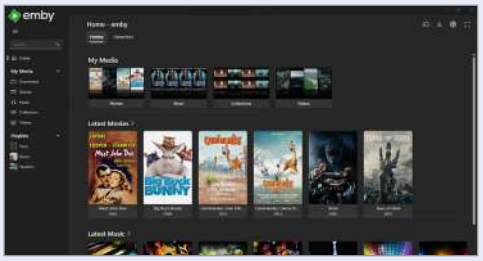
Jellyfin

I think I'm one step ahead of your writer Nick Peers, who has switched from Plex to Jellyfin in his quest for the best media-server software (Issue 716, page 62). I used Plex until 2022, then switched to Jellyfin. But I found it far too hard to use, and it seemed to add features before they were fully ready.

And what I use instead

I've now made the leap from Jellyfin to **Emby** (https://emby.media, pictured). They're not wholly dissimilar because Jellyfin is a fork of Emby. But Emby just has more polish and is aimed more at the casual user who wants an effortless home server. To use Jellyfin properly I had to install plug-ins and dig through layers of settings.

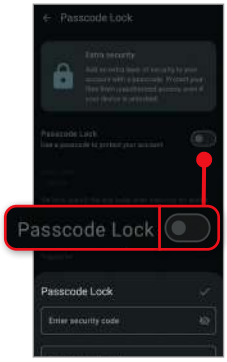
I think the difference is that Jellyfin is open source. This has some benefits, but I think it suits people who want to customise software. I just like downloading something and having it work straight away. The downside is that you have to pay for some of Emby's better features, and these are free in Jellyfin.



But for simply downloading, streaming and playback Emby is streets ahead.

Ken Howard

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk



adding another layer of protection.

Open the app, then tap the three horizontal lines top left. Now tap Settings, then Passcode Lock. Tap the Passcode Lock slider (see screenshot left) then type the passcode you want, and repeat it below.

Stephen Thomas

AI CHATBOT

Delete all your shared links

Reading how ChatGPT made some chats searchable on Google (Issue 716, page 10) made me nervous because I often create links of my chats for my friends and family to read. I was reluctant to use ChatGPT for a few days, but then crept back on and realised I would feel reassured if I deleted all my shared chats.

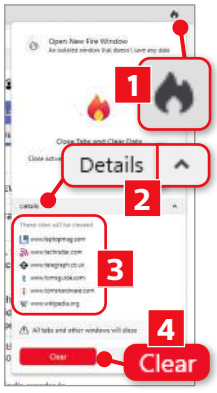
To do this, click your name at the bottom left then select Settings followed by 'Data control' in the left-hand menu. Now click Manage to the right of 'Shared links', then the three-dot icon at the top right. Here you need to select 'Delete all shared links' (1 in our screenshot above), then OK. You can also click the bin icon to delete specific chats 2. There's a share icon also for sending to trusted contacts.

Rory Willis

BROWSER

Check which sites DuckDuckGo is clearing data from

I've been using DuckDuckGo's browser (www.snipca.com/55750) since you recommended it a few years ago, and it's served me well. I was interested in the recent update you wrote about in Issue 716 (page 18) because you mentioned the Fire button, which deletes all your browsing data. I agree it's a great tool, and it's one of the reasons DuckDuckGo is now my main browser. But a word of warning: you should always check which sites are being wiped.



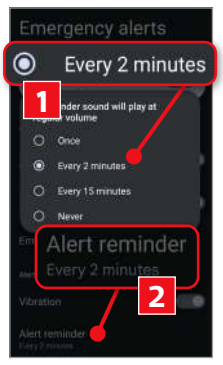
To do this, click the Fire icon (1 in our screenshot below left) then the Details dropdown menu 2. Revealed below will be the sites that will be affected 3 if you proceed to click Clear 4. I always do this now, having previously lost data from sites that I actually wanted to keep.

Keith Marwell

PHONE

Set reminders for Government's emergency alerts

I agree with Jean Watkins, who advised readers to keep the Government's emergency alerts activated (Star Letter, Issue 716). She lives in an area of Somerset prone to flooding. I'm not too far away, in neighbouring Devon, and like her I received an alert about Storm Darragh last December.



While double-checking recently that my Android phone was set to receive alerts, I noticed its 'Alert reminder' setting was set to Never. That wasn't good. I'd want the alert to be played more than once in case I missed it first time. So I tapped it and chose every two minutes from the options available (1 in our screenshot below left). I thought 15 minutes would be too long between reminders. The options closed instantly, and the 'Alert reminder' setting had been updated to 'Every 2 minutes' 2.

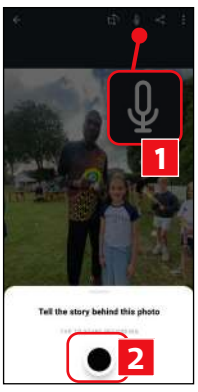
Janet Agnew

APP

Add voice memories to photos

One of the best things about MyHeritage's Reimagine app (www.snipca.com/55516), which you recommended in Issue 715's Cover Feature ('50 best ways AI will improve your life'), is that it's easy to record an audio memory of a particular photo.

Once you've uploaded a photo tap it so it enlarges, then tap the microphone icon at the top (1 in our screenshot right). Now tap the black dot at the bottom 2 and start speaking. Click the square dot to stop. Play it back and decide whether to bin or save it. Once saved, the mic icon turns into a play icon. Tap this to hear your memory.



Mark Gavin

Reader recommends...

PNY Elite-X Fit USB stick

£30 from Amazon www.snipca.com/54559

I often work outdoors and always seek out devices (radios, tablets etc) that can survive the elements and being carted around from shed to garage and back again. I had never really considered rugged USB sticks too until reading your review of the PNY Elite-X Fit USB stick (Issue 709, page 26).

My first impression was that it looked too small to be of any use. Surely I'd lose it among all the junk in my shed? But your review mentioned it's easy to attach to a keyring, and that sounded perfect for me. My keyring is the first work-related item I pick up every morning.

I ended up buying four 256GB sticks for around £120 in total. I've already filled up the first, and am now on my second. Its retractable cover means it can survive close encounters with all kinds of dust and grime in my pockets. I'd recommend it to anyone who gets their hands dirty every day.

Ian Alderton

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

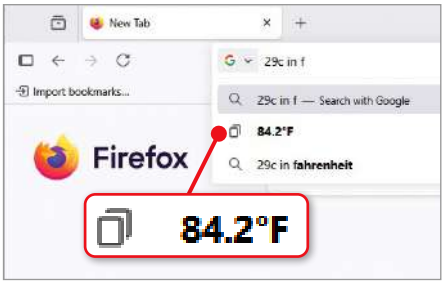
FIREFOX

Convert units in the address bar

As of Firefox 141 (released in July), you can use the browser's address bar to perform unit and measurement conversions. This saves you having to visit a website or ask an AI tool for the answer.

Simply enter a number and the unit types you want to convert from and to, and Firefox will show the result in the dropdown menu below the address bar. Click the Copy button next to it (see screenshot below) to save the figure to your clipboard to paste elsewhere.

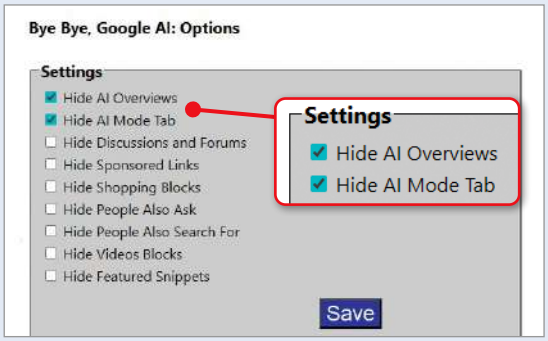
The feature supports temperature, length, mass and angle conversions, and can tell you the time in different time zones. You can also use the address bar to perform simple calculations.



CHROMIUM

Hide AI features in Google search

As we reported in Issue 717 (page 43), Google's AI Overviews has now been joined by its new AI Mode on search-results pages. These find you relevant information faster by summarising content from multiple sources, but they're not always accurate and you may prefer to visit individual websites.



Google doesn't let you turn off its AI features, even if you never use them, but you can do so using 'Bye Bye, Google AI' (www.snipca.com/55947). This extension hides AI Overviews and AI Mode from your search results, as well as other annoyances such as sponsored links and 'People also ask' questions.

When you install 'Bye Bye, Google AI', it will open an Options page in a new tab – if it doesn't, click its toolbar button and select Options. Tick the boxes Hide AI Overviews and Hide AI Mode Tab (see screenshot), plus anything else you want to conceal, then click Save.

The AI features will now be hidden from your Google search results. However, the extension can't remove the AI Mode button from the search box on the Google homepage.

EDGE

Switch to Copilot Mode more easily

In Issue 717 (page 42), we wrote about Edge's new Copilot Mode, which turns it into an AI-powered browser. We explained how to switch the feature on and off by visiting the Copilot Mode web page (www.snipca.com/55769), but Microsoft has now added an easier method.

Click Edge's three-line menu button, choose Settings and click the new 'AI innovations' option in the left-hand menu – you can also go straight to edge://settings/ai. Switch on the Copilot Mode setting (see screenshot below left) to activate the browser's new AI features and design. Click 'New tab' to get started with Copilot Mode.

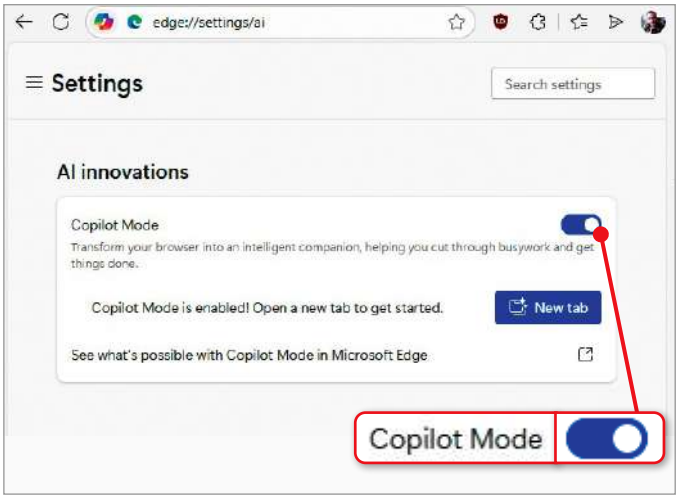
CHROMIUM

Block website notification requests

Chrome and other Chromium browsers have a setting that's supposed to prevent websites from asking if they can send you notifications. Sadly, it's not completely effective and you may still see the request when visiting sites for the first time.

To stop this happening, you can enable a new filter in the excellent content blocker uBlock Origin Lite (www.snipca.com/55952). Right-click the extension's toolbar button, choose Options and click the 'Filter lists' tab.

In the Annoyances section, select the new option 'EasyList – Notifications' (see screenshot below). This will activate the filter and block notification requests.


edge://settings/ai
Settings
Search settings
AI innovations
Copilot Mode
Transform your browser into an intelligent companion, helping you cut through busywork and get things done.
Copilot Mode is enabled! Open a new tab to get started.
New tab
See what's possible with Copilot Mode in Microsoft Edge
Copilot Mode

CHATGPT

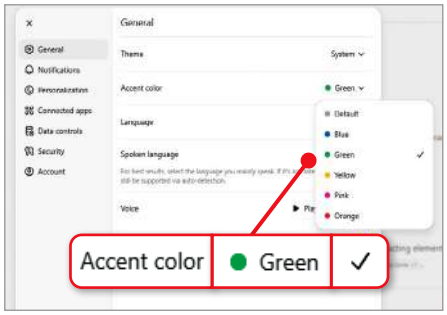
Customise the colour of chats

The new GPT-5 LLM has made ChatGPT faster, more accurate and less prone to 'hallucination'. But aside from the new personality types we wrote about in Issue 717 (page 6), most new features added by GPT-5 are currently restricted to paying subscribers.

One new option available to all ChatGPT users makes your chats look more vibrant. It changes the colour of the Send and 'Voice mode' buttons, your message bubbles and highlighted text – from the default grey to blue, green, yellow, pink or orange.

To change the default colour, on the ChatGPT website, click your profile name bottom-left and choose Settings then General. Click the dropdown menu next to 'Accent color' and select your preferred hue (see screenshot below).

In the ChatGPT mobile app, open the left-hand menu, tap your name and choose Personalization, then Accent Color.

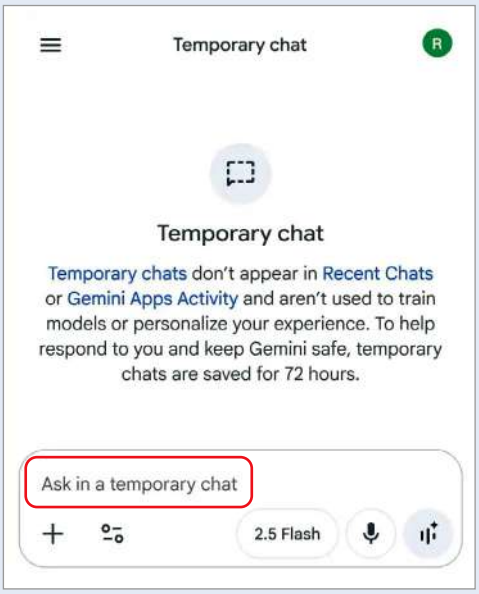


GEMINI

Converse privately in a temporary chat

Google has added a much-requested 'Temporary chat' feature to Gemini, just like the one long available in ChatGPT. This prevents your conversations from being saved to your chat history and used to 'personalise your experience' and train Gemini's language models. It's similar to using incognito or private mode in your web browser.

To start a temporary chat, open the side menu on the Gemini website or in its mobile app, and tap the speech-bubble icon next to 'New chat'. This will switch you to 'Temporary chat' mode where you can talk privately to the chatbot (see screenshot) without the details influencing future conversations.


Temporary chat
Temporary chat
Temporary chats don't appear in Recent Chats or Gemini Apps Activity and aren't used to train models or personalize your experience. To help respond to you and keep Gemini safe, temporary chats are saved for 72 hours.
Ask in a temporary chat
2.5 Flash

Google says it will store temporary chats for 72 hours, so Gemini can "respond to you and to process any feedback you choose to provide", after which they'll be permanently deleted.

The 'Temporary chat' feature is being rolled out gradually to the Gemini website and mobile apps, so you may not see it yet.

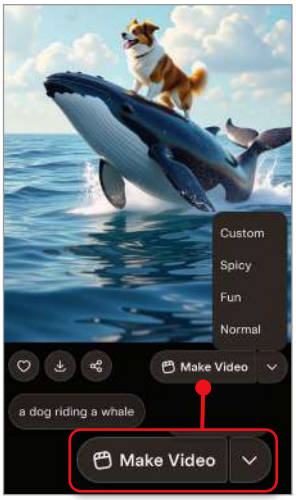
GROK

Create videos from images for free

Grok's video-generation tool Imagine is now available to all users of its Android (www.snipca.com/55983) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55984) app without a subscription. This turns images into short videos – with sound – and is noticeably faster than rival AI video tools.

Open the Grok app, tap the Imagine tab, and either upload a picture or describe one in the 'Type to Imagine' box. With the first option, Grok will automatically animate the still image. With the second, it will produce several image variations to choose from.

Select the picture you want and tap Make Video (see screenshot below left) – choose from styles including Custom, Fun and Normal. Once your video has been created, you can download or share the result.

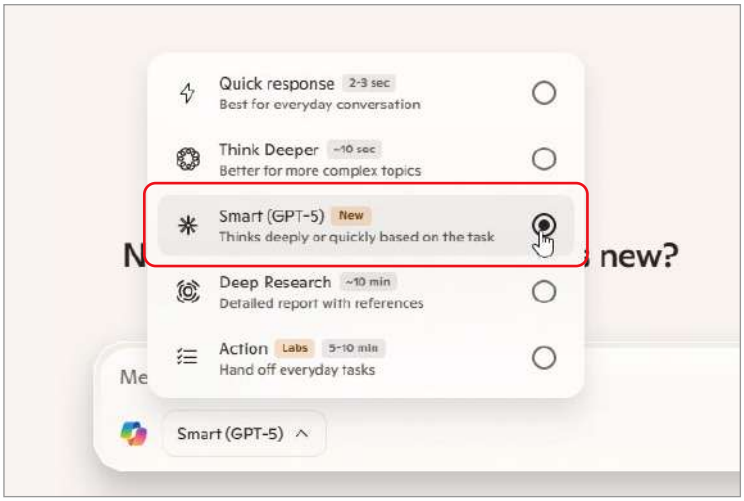


COPILOT

Get faster answers from Smart mode

Microsoft has brought the new GPT-5 AI model to Copilot in the form of a new 'Smart mode'. This automatically determines whether the chatbot should respond quickly or 'think deeper' based on the nature of the task.

To switch to the new mode, click the dropdown menu in Copilot's message box and choose 'Smart (GPT-5)' (see screenshot below). Enter your query or command and Smart mode will provide 'the best possible solution'. It saves you having to decide between 'Quick response' and 'Think Deeper', and can reduce response times by up to eight seconds.


Quick response 2-3 sec
Best for everyday conversation
Think Deeper ~10 sec
Better for more complex topics
Smart (GPT-5) New
Thinks deeply or quickly based on the task
Deep Research ~10 min
Detailed report with references
Action Labs 5-10 min
Hand off everyday tasks
Smart (GPT-5)

Phone and Tablet Tips

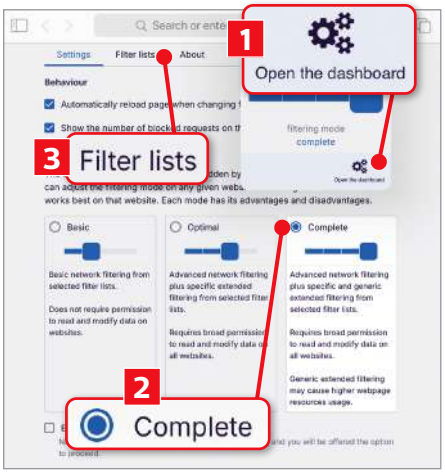
iOS

Block ads in Safari using uBlock Origin Lite

Although Apple's Safari browser can block pop-ups, prevent cross-site tracking and hide your IP address from known trackers, it doesn't include an ad blocker. There are several apps for blocking ads in Safari, including AdGuard (www.snipca.com/55953) and Ghostery (www.snipca.com/55954), and now there's an even better option – uBlock Origin Lite (www.snipca.com/55956).

The brilliant content blocker was added to the Apple App Store in August, letting you use it with Safari on your iPhone or iPad. This means you can now filter ads and trackers from web pages as effectively as you can in your desktop browser.

To set up uBlock Origin Lite, install the app then open the Settings app on your iPhone or iPad. Tap 'Apps' then Safari, followed by Extensions. Select 'uBlock Origin Lite' and switch on Allow Extension.



The extension will automatically block ads and trackers as you browse the web. You can adjust its default filtering mode by pressing the Extensions (jigsaw piece) icon in Safari's address bar and tapping uBO Lite, then 'Open the dashboard' (1 in our screenshot below left).

Set the mode to Complete 2 to block the maximum number of ads. Tap the 'Filter lists' tab 3 to enable filters for blocking other annoyances, such as cookie-consent banners.

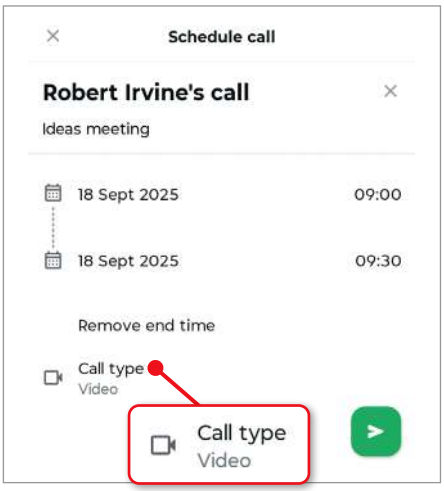
Note that your iPhone or iPad must be running iOS/iPadOS 18.6 to use uBlock Origin Lite in Safari.

ANDROID & iOS

Schedule voice and video calls in WhatsApp

WhatsApp has added the option to schedule voice and video calls you make through the app. This lets you plan ahead when, for example, you want to coordinate a remote family catch-up or organise a meeting with colleagues. You could also use it to schedule one-on-one calls with friends, though that might seem rather officious.

To use the new feature, press the Calls tab in WhatsApp, tap the green Call button and choose 'Schedule call'. Select the date, start and end times of your call (you can remove the latter), enter an optional description, and specify whether it's a voice or video call (see screenshot above). Tap the green Send button, choose the contacts you want to invite to your call, then tap Send again.



You can see your upcoming calls on the Calls tab, including a list of attendees. To change the details or cancel the call, tap 'Edit event'. All participants will receive a notification when the call is about to begin.

ANDROID & iOS

Watch ITVX shows in picture-in-picture mode

The ITVX app for Android (www.snipca.com/55960) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55961) has introduced a picture-in-picture (PiP) mode. This means you can keep watching programmes and films in a mini video player when you

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Cassette: Home Video Player

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/55973

This retro-style video player lets you watch videos stored on your iPhone or iPad like you're watching old VHS tapes. It displays video files as video-cassette icons, which you tap to load in the slot on the old-fashioned TV. The free version plays a random video – pay 99p a month to choose the content to play on-screen.

Ente Photos

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55963

iOS www.snipca.com/55964

This privacy-focused photo-backup app has improved its AI-powered face detection and added new layout options. These group your pictures by day, week, month or year. Ente has also launched an advanced image editor that lets you adjust brightness, contrast and colour, apply filters and emojis, and doodle on your photos.

Organic Maps

Free

Android www.snipca.com/55965

iOS www.snipca.com/55966

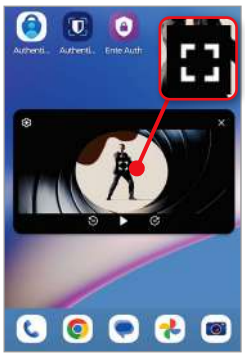
Organic Maps has updated its OpenStreetMap data to display hiking and cycling routes on all maps you download to explore offline. To view these, tap the Layers button top left and select Hiking and Cycling in the 'Map Styles and Layers' panel. The Android version has also added track-elevation graphs to maps.

*Contains in-app purchases

switch to other apps or return to your home screen.

PiP mode should activate automatically when you leave the ITVX app, transferring the current TV show or movie to a floating player window. This can then be moved around your screen and resized by pinching it with your thumb and index finger.

The PiP player includes play and pause controls, and options for skipping back and forth by 10 seconds. Tap the full-screen icon (see screenshot) to return to the standard player in the ITVX app.



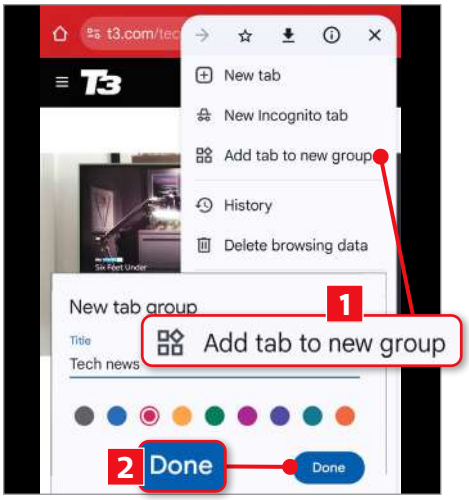
The Android version of the streaming service has also added a 'pinch-to-zoom' option that zooms in on the content that's playing.

ANDROID

Organise Chrome tabs into groups

All the main desktop browsers let you organise related tabs into themed groups, to make it easier to find them when you have lots of web pages open. The feature is also available in the Android version of Chrome (www.snipca.com/55969), and the latest update to the browser (to version 139) makes it much easier to use.

To group tabs in Chrome on your phone or tablet, tap the browser's three-dot menu button and choose the 'Add tab to new group' option (1 in our screenshot below). Enter a name for the group, assign it a colour and tap Done 2. Add further tabs to the group by selecting 'Add tab to group' in the menu, then the group name.

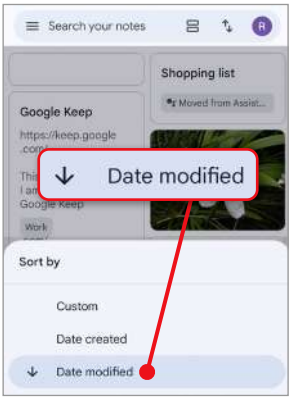


You can access your tab groups by tapping the tab-switcher icon to the right of the address bar. To create another group, tap the menu button again and choose 'New tab group'.

ANDROID

Sort your Google Keep notes by date

The Android version of the popular note-taking tool Google Keep (www.snipca.com/55970) has added the handy option of sorting your notes by date. Previously, they were presented randomly on the app's home screen, but now you can keep them better organised.



To do so, tap the new Sort (double-arrow) button in the 'Search your notes' box and choose 'Date created' or 'Date modified' (see screenshot left) to sort your notes accordingly. Alternatively, select Custom to arrange your notes in whatever way you want.

BEST APPS FOR... Upgrading your phone's clock

Digital Clock

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55976

Many free clock apps suffer from ads and unnecessary features, but Digital Clock keeps things clean and simple. View the time, day and date; change the background colour by swiping left or right; tap the icon top left to switch orientation; and use the slider to adjust brightness levels. It syncs with the alarm clock on your Android phone.

Best For Simple time display

Flip Clock - World Clock

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55979

This customisable clock offers a choice of colourful themes and can display the weather and your phone's battery status. You can make it tick and chime on the hour, view the time in different cities around the world, and add a clock widget to your home screen. For iOS, try ClockPhone (www.snipca.com/55980), which has a similar design and options.

Best For Customising your clock

Alarmy

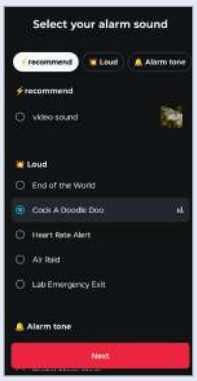
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55977

iOS www.snipca.com/55978

Alarmy gets you up in the morning using a loud sound of your choice. These range from a cockerel crowing and air-raid sirens to cheerful tunes and motivational sounds. Set 'missions' you need to complete to make sure you're wide awake, including typing challenges, and customise Alarmy's appearance with 'feel good' wallpapers.

Best For Personalised alarm clock

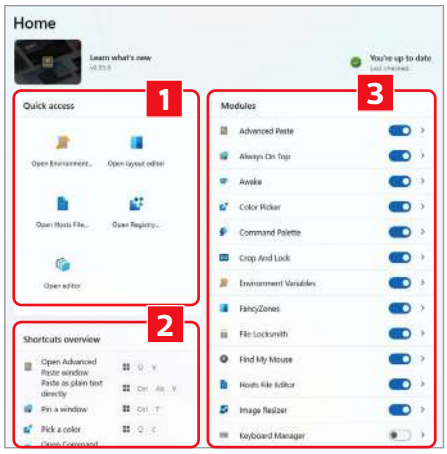


*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Use the improved PowerToys dashboard

The latest version of Microsoft's PowerToys (0.93) introduces a vastly improved Settings dashboard. On the homepage, there's now a 'Quick access' panel (1 in our screenshot below) providing instant links to useful advanced tools, such as the registry and layout editor. There's also now a dedicated 'Shortcuts overview' 2, to remind yourself of handy keyboard shortcuts. And, most useful of all, the Modules pane 3 provides a quick-glance overview of which PowerToys tools you currently have turned on or off.



Version 0.93 also has a faster, less resource-hungry Command Palette tool and a new Spotlight mode for the Mouse Highlighter, which dims the entire screen, leaving only the area around your mouse highlighted. If you already have PowerToys installed, you'll be prompted to update it to the new version, but you can also install it by going to www.snipca.com/56079 and clicking the x64 or ARM64 link, depending on your PC's processor.

WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

Select a program window when recording in Snipping Tool

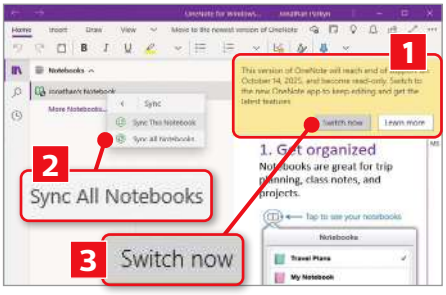
If you're a Windows 11 Insider, you can now select specific areas of a program when recording your screen in Snipping Tool. Microsoft says this gives you a "simple, focused" way to record what's happening in a particular space on your screen, without having to crop later.

Press Windows key+Shift+R to launch Snipping Tool, then click the screen-recording (movie camera) icon (1 in our screenshot below left) followed by the dropdown menu to the right. Now click Window 2 and Snipping Tool will resize the recording region to tightly match the program window you choose. Once recording begins, the region remains fixed. If the program moves or gets covered by another window, the recording won't follow it. There's also a Rectangle option 3 that lets you draw around the section of screen you want to record.

WINDOWS 10

Sync OneNote notebooks before support ends

If you're still using the version of the OneNote app that came with Windows 10, you've probably seen the 'end of support' notification (1 in our screenshot above right) that appears when you launch the tool. After 14 October 2025, the 'OneNote for Windows 10' app will become read-only, which means you'll only be able to view and export your existing notes, not create or edit them.



To carry on using OneNote you'll need to switch to the newer version of the tool, though you must sync your notebooks first. If you don't, you could lose any notes saved on your computer.

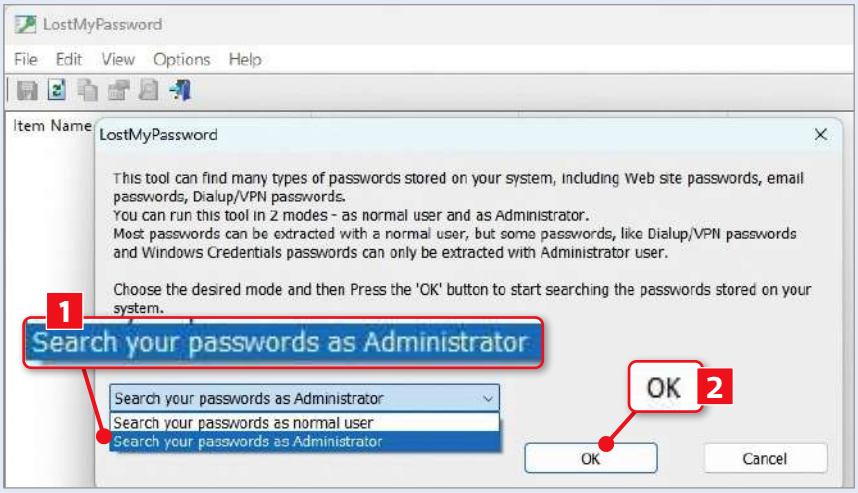
First, make sure you're signed into OneNote with your Microsoft account. Now right-click any notebook, then click Sync and select 'Sync All Notebooks' 2. Once syncing is complete, click 'Switch now' 3 in the 'end of support' message and follow the steps to migrate to the new version of the OneNote app (free from www.snipca.com/56090).

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Recover your lost passwords

New from one of our favourite independent developers NirSoft, LostMyPassword hunts through your programs – including web browsers – and operating system to uncover all the logins you've saved. To get it, head to www.snipca.com/56080 and under the Feedback heading click either 'Download LostMyPassword (32-bit)' or 'Download LostMyPassword (64-bit)', depending on your processor. Microsoft Defender might warn that it's unsafe, but this is a false positive.

Once you've downloaded LostMyPassword, extract the ZIP file, then run the 'LostMyPassword.exe' file and select 'Search your passwords as Administrator' (1 in our screenshot) from the dropdown menu (this will uncover more passwords than searching as a normal user). Finally, click OK 2.

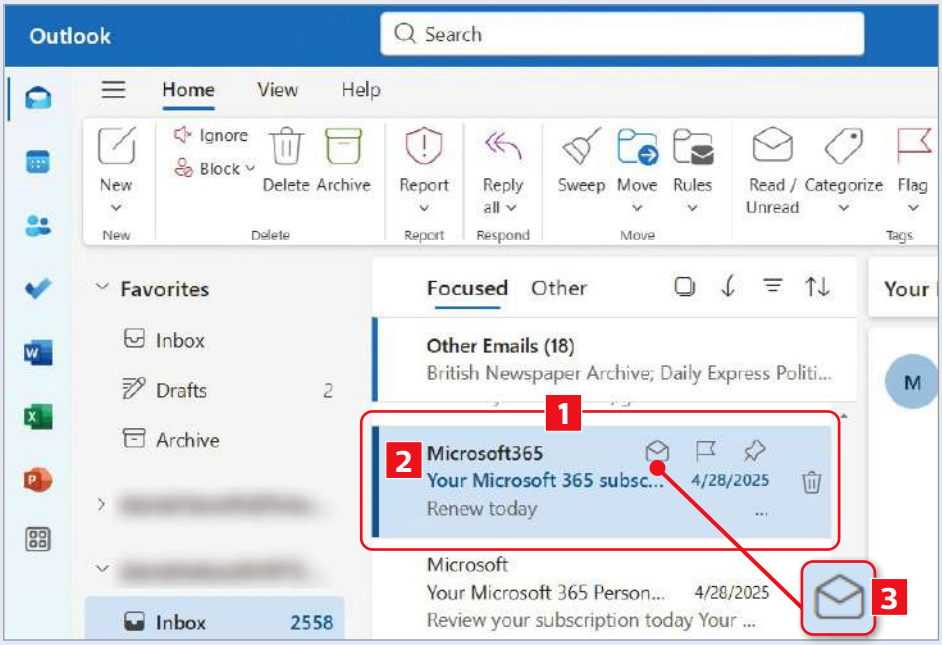

LostMyPassword
File Edit View Options Help
Item Name
LostMyPassword
This tool can find many types of passwords stored on your system, including Web site passwords, email passwords, Dialup/VPN passwords.
You can run this tool in 2 modes - as normal user and as Administrator.
Most passwords can be extracted with a normal user, but some passwords, like Dialup/VPN passwords and Windows Credentials passwords can only be extracted with Administrator user.
Choose the desired mode and then Press the 'OK' button to start searching the passwords stored on your system.
1
Search your passwords as Administrator
Search your passwords as Administrator
Search your passwords as normal user
Search your passwords as Administrator
OK 2
OK
Cancel

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK

Mark emails as read and unread using keyboard shortcuts

As you scroll through your Outlook inbox you can use keyboard shortcuts to mark emails as read or unread. This works in both the new and old ('Classic') versions of Outlook.

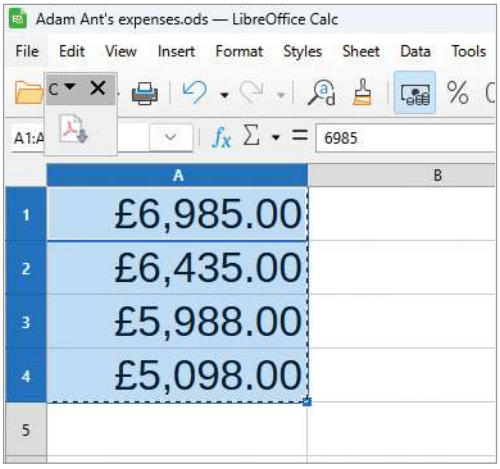
You need to select an email in your inbox so it's highlighted in blue (1 in our screenshot). Its sender and subject line will be in bold 2, indicating it hasn't been read. Pressing Ctrl+Q will mark it as read, and the words inside will lose their bold formatting. This has the same effect as hovering your mouse over the email and clicking the envelope icon that appears 3. Pressing Ctrl+U marks an email as unread and restores the bold formatting.

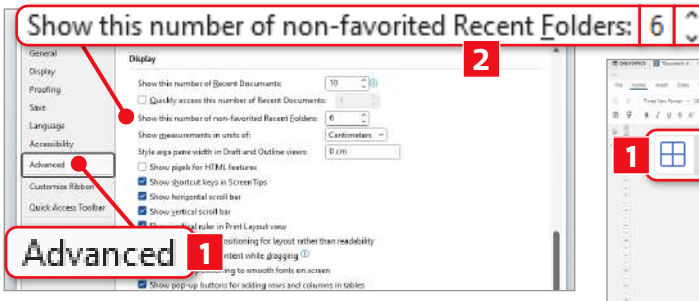


LIBREOFFICE CALC & MICROSOFT EXCEL

Turn off 'marching ants' around cells

When you select cells to copy and paste in a spreadsheet, both Calc and Excel indicate them with a moving dotted border – sometimes nicknamed 'marching ants' (see screenshot below). If you find this effect distracting, press the Esc key and it will disappear. Your cells will remain selected though, ready for you to paste wherever you like.



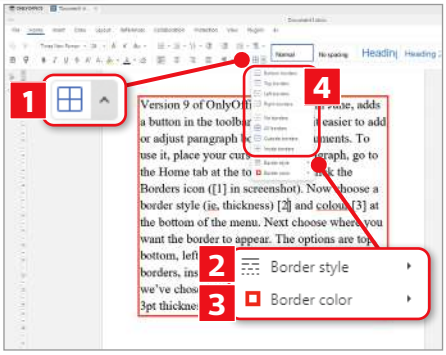


MICROSOFT OFFICE

Set how many recent folders you can save to

Microsoft Office lets you pin favourite folders so they're always at the top when you're opening or saving files. You can also right-click a folder and select 'Add to Favorites'.

By default Office also shows the 50 most recent folders you've been working on but haven't pinned as favourites. These are listed under the Older heading when you save a file. If 50 is too many for you, change it by clicking File at the top left, then Options at the bottom left followed by Advanced (1 in our screenshot above) in the left menu. Now, on the right, scroll to the Display section and choose a number in the 'Show this number of non-favorited Recent Folders' box 2. Click OK to confirm.



ONLYOFFICE

Add paragraph borders from the toolbar

Version 9 of OnlyOffice, released in June, adds a button in the toolbar that makes it easier to add or adjust paragraph borders in documents. To use it, place your cursor in the paragraph, go to the Home tab at the top left, then click the Borders icon (1 in our screenshot above). Now choose a border style (ie, thickness) 2 and colour 3 at the bottom of the menu. Next choose where you want the border to appear. The options are top, bottom, left and right, as well as no borders, all borders, inside and outside 4. In our example we've chosen all borders, with a border style of 3pt thickness in red.

In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Create and share a club leaderboard

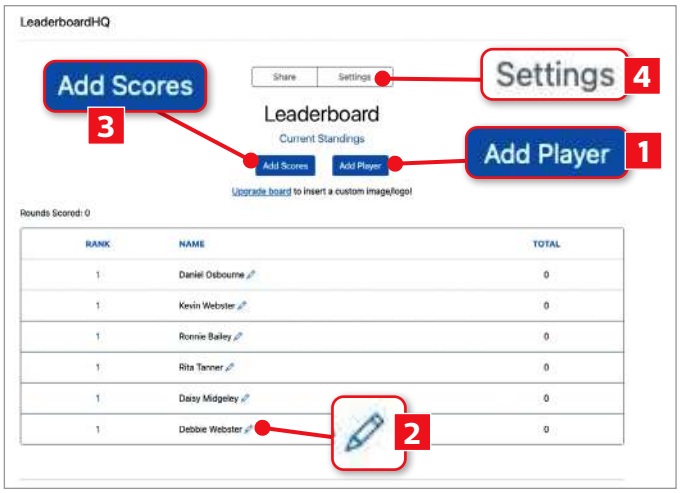
If your club has any kind of competitive element, a shareable leaderboard is a great way to keep members up to date with latest rankings, top scores and so on.

This is especially useful if you run, say, a snooker, darts or tennis club. But a leaderboard can also be used for a variety of other scenarios. Perhaps you run a bridge club and want to track tournament results across a season. Or maybe your local history society or gardening club hosts a regular summer quiz league. Or perhaps you just need a handy tool to tally scores on a one-off game night.

You can use Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets for this, but spreadsheets can feel clunky and aren't always the most engaging way to present members with their rankings. Instead, we suggest using LeaderboardHQ. It's an online tool designed specifically for creating and sharing leaderboards, with a clean, simple interface and no need to download or install special software.

You can set up multiple players, track scores, update results instantly and share the leaderboard with your members. Best of all, its free tier includes all the features most local groups will ever need – you don't even need to set up an account.

A reasonable one-off payment of $10 (£7.50) unlocks premium features, such as the ability to upload your club's logo, use custom colour schemes for different teams and more.



LeaderboardHQ lets you create a free leaderboard for ranking your club members

Set up a free leaderboard

Let's say your club runs a small snooker league and you want to keep track of match results and show who's top of the table. To set this up, go to the LeaderboardHQ website (www.snipca.com/55997), then click the 'Get Started!' button at the bottom of the page.

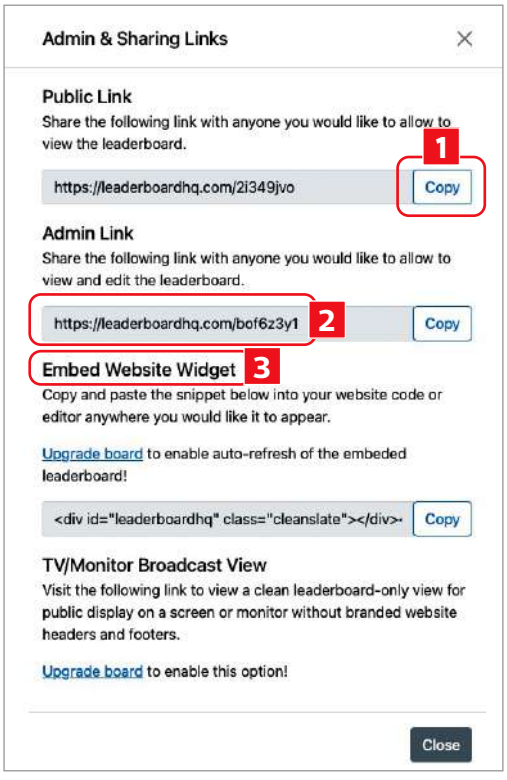
On the next page, click Add Player (1 in our screenshot above right), enter the player's name in the 'Player name' box, then click Add Player. Repeat this process for every player in your club (uploading players in bulk is a premium feature). If you make a mistake, click the pencil icon 2 next to the relevant name to edit it, then click Save Changes. You can remove players by clicking the pencil icon, then clicking Delete Player.

Once you've added all your players, click the Add Scores button 3. On the next screen, enter a score for each player in your list, then click Add Scores. The leaderboard will update, ranking your players in score order. Each round, you can repeat this step to add the latest scores and update the rankings.

And that's basically it. You've now created your leaderboard. To refine it further, click the Settings button 4. Here you can change the leaderboard's title or description, and customise how the leaderboard works – whether you want to rank by highest or lowest score, for example, or you want to include an elimination element. Click Save Changes when you've finished.

Share your leaderboard with members

Click Share at the top of your leaderboard and you'll see three links. Click Copy (1 in our screenshot right) next to the Public Link and paste it into an email, text or WhatsApp group chat – this will allow your members to view the leaderboard. Keep a note of the Admin Link 2 for yourself or send it to anyone else who needs to be able to edit the leaderboard to add or remove players, update scores and so on. If you want to host the leaderboard on your club's website, click Copy under Embed Website Widget 3 and paste the code into the appropriate web page.


Admin & Sharing Links
Public Link
Share the following link with anyone you would like to allow to view the leaderboard.
1
https://leaderboardhq.com/2i349jvo
Copy
Admin Link
Share the following link with anyone you would like to allow to view and edit the leaderboard.
https://leaderboardhq.com/bof6z3y1
2
Copy
Embed Website Widget
3
Copy and paste the snippet below into your website code or editor anywhere you would like it to appear.
Upgrade board to enable auto-refresh of the embeded leaderboard!

Copy
TV/Monitor Broadcast View
Visit the following link to view a clean leaderboard-only view for public display on a screen or monitor without branded website headers and footers.
Upgrade board to enable this option!
Close

Share your leaderboard with other members or on your club's website

Next issue: Rehearse your presentation using PowerPoint's Coach

What's All the Fuss About...

YouTube age checks

Google's video-streaming service has introduced AI-powered age verification – but users aren't impressed

What are they?

Google-owned YouTube has started asking users in the US to prove their age before allowing them to watch certain video content. It's not just a basic 'click to confirm' pop-up, either. The company has introduced an advanced AI-based age-estimation system that attempts to establish how old you are, based on your account data, viewing history and more.

How do they work?

If you try to watch a restricted video, YouTube will use machine-learning tools to attempt to determine whether or not you are over 18, based on its interpretation of various factors. These include which videos you've viewed in the past, the types of videos you have previously searched for and how long you've had the account for.

If the system identifies you as underage, you'll see an automated message stating that 'We couldn't verify that you're an adult' (1 in our screenshot) – you'll then need to click the 'Verify age' button 2 to prove that you're over 18 by uploading an officially recognised form of ID, such as a driver's licence or credit card.

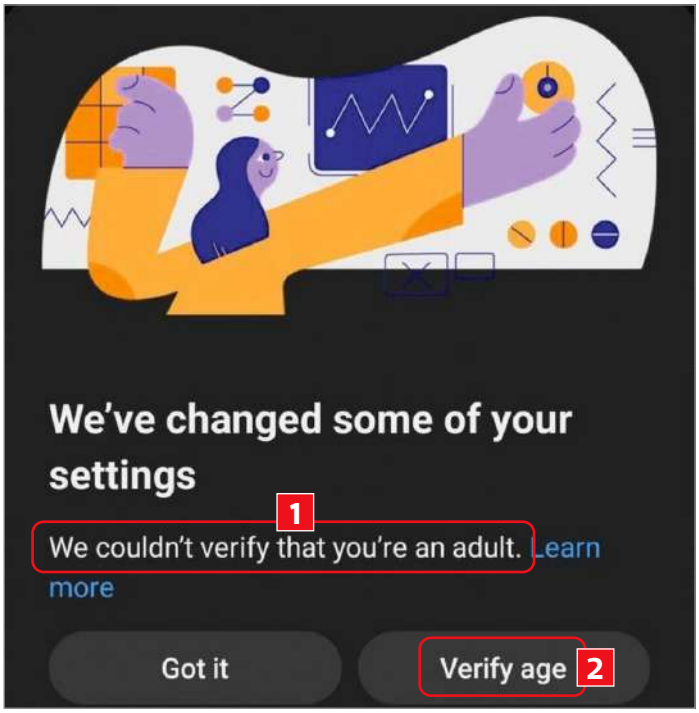
According to some news outlets, YouTube may also be considering a system in which users can prove their age by uploading a selfie for a quick check, but we have yet to see this in action.

Why is YouTube doing this?

In a recent blog post (www.snipca.com/56003), James Beser, Director of Product Management for YouTube Youth, stated that the company is taking these actions in order to make sure younger users "have a safe and age appropriate experience".

The truth is that more and more online streaming and social-media services are coming under pressure from regulators, governments and child-safety campaigners on both sides of the Atlantic to introduce measures that protect children from harmful or inappropriate content, such as violent or adult videos.

Similar systems are already used on some adult websites, but this is the first time a mainstream platform of YouTube's size and popularity has pushed AI age verification at scale.



Some adult YouTube users in the US have failed the new age-verification check

So why are people so angry about it?

Large numbers of YouTube users are already up in arms about these changes. Many cite privacy fears, regarding how YouTube will manage the data used to verify your age. For example, where sensitive personal information – such as your ID – will be stored. And could it be stolen by criminals in a data breach? YouTube insists that data is deleted as soon as the verification process is complete, but many users are sceptical.

Meanwhile, adult US users are already finding that the system falsely identifies them as underage – many of whom have been venting their frustrations on platforms such as X and Reddit.

Who does this affect?

Right now, the system has only been rolled out to US-based users. If you're over 18 and already signed in with a verified Google account, you might not notice any difference. But younger Americans – or adults who don't want to hand over their ID – may suddenly find a large chunk of YouTube is inaccessible.

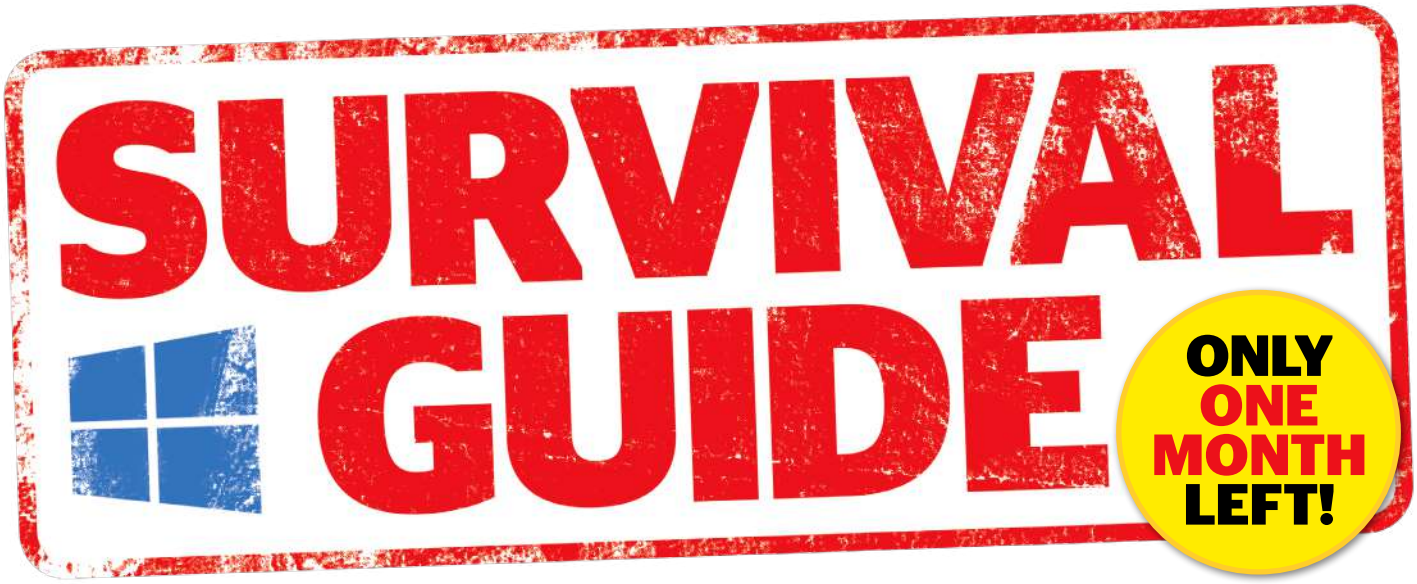
But does it actually protect kids?

That's the big question. Critics say that determined teens can still find workarounds, while those who comply are mainly legitimate adult users. Grown-ups with 'childish' viewing habits are most likely to be misclassified.

Is this coming to the UK?

Almost certainly. As we explained in our Cover Feature in Issue 717 (page 51), the UK's new Online Safety Act obliges tech firms to protect children from harmful material, and age checks are one way to comply. While YouTube hasn't yet confirmed a UK rollout, James Beser makes it clear that the company fully intends to extend the scheme "to other markets" in the future. Expect it to arrive on these shores sooner rather than later.

WINDOWS 10



Unwilling or unable to upgrade to Windows 11 when Microsoft ends support for Windows 10? Robert Irvine explains how to keep using your PC safely after 14 October

When Microsoft launched Windows 11 in October 2021, it assumed that within four years nearly every PC user would be running the new operating system. It therefore stuck to its original end-of-support date for Windows 10 – 14 October 2025.

Now that day is almost upon us and it's clear Microsoft's prediction was over-optimistic. The latest figures show that, while Windows 11 now has more users than Windows 10, with a 53 per cent global market share, 43 per cent of us still run the older operating system (www.snipca.com/56046).

That equates to around 600 million users, who all face the same dilemma of what to do when Windows 10 stops receiving security updates. One Californian man has even filed a lawsuit against Microsoft, claiming the company is "forcing its customers to purchase new [Windows 11] devices" (www.snipca.com/56047).

Thankfully, there are nine options for Windows 10 users who don't want to upgrade to Windows 11, or can't because their PC doesn't meet the minimum system requirements. In this feature we explain them all, in order of convenience.

Of course, the easiest option is to do nothing when support ends, and keep using Windows 10 like you always have done. But being complacent will expose your PC to serious security risks, so we strongly advise against it – especially because some workarounds are surprisingly simple.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get free security updates from Microsoft for one year
- Extend Windows 10 support for your PC until 2030
- Stop Microsoft automatically installing Windows 11 on your PC
- Run your Windows 10 PC in a virtual machine in Windows 11
- Dual-boot Windows 10 and a free Linux distro
- Upgrade an incompatible Windows 10 PC to Windows 11

OPTION 1 BACK UP DATA TO ONEDRIVE

In June, Microsoft threw a lifeline to Windows 10 users by announcing a free way to receive Extended Security Updates (ESUs) once it ends support on 14 October. Rather than pay to keep your PC safe after the deadline (see page 52), simply turn on Windows Backup to be enrolled in the ESU scheme (www.snipca.com/55995).

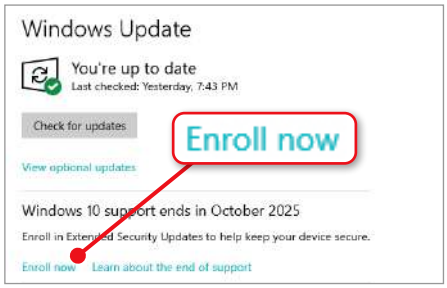
This will sync important folders, settings and credentials (logins and passwords) to your OneDrive account and automatically upload any new or changed files. It's the easiest, cheapest and safest option, but there are a couple of catches. That's why we called it "cynical and clever" on Microsoft's part, when we reported the story in Issue 714 (page 6).

First, enabling Windows Backup only entitles you to free security updates until 13 October 2026 (and not feature updates or tech support). Unless Microsoft extends the offer for a further year, you'll then have to upgrade to Windows 11 anyway – or try one of the options recommended in this feature.

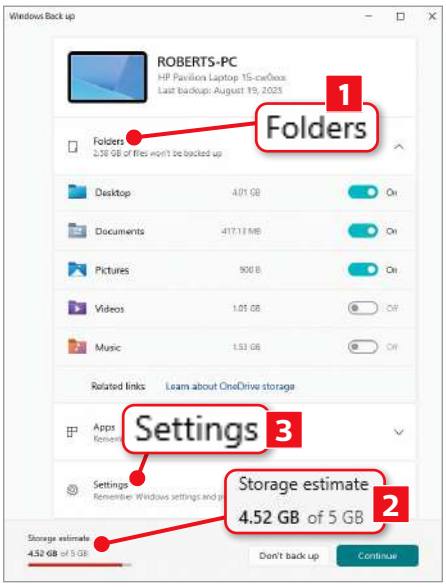
Second, OneDrive only gives you 5GB of free online storage. Once you hit that limit, Windows Backup will stop syncing your data and you may stop receiving security updates.

If you've owned your Windows 10 PC for several years, you'll probably have files totalling a much larger amount than 5GB. So you'll either need to remove unnecessary items from the folders you sync to OneDrive – to keep within the limit – or pay for extra cloud storage.

You can get 100GB by paying £1.99 a month or £19.99 a year for Microsoft 365 Basic. If that's not enough, Microsoft 365 Personal (£8.49 a month or £84.99 a year) gives you 1TB of storage, while a Microsoft 365 Family plan (£10.49 per month of £104.99 a year) includes a whopping 6TB, though it's limited to 1TB per person. See www.snipca.com/55994 for details of the various plans.


Windows Update
You're up to date
Last checked: Yesterday, 7:43 PM
Check for updates
Enroll now
View optional updates
Windows 10 support ends in October 2025
Enroll in Extended Security Updates to help keep your device secure.
Enroll now
Learn about the end of support

Click 'Enroll now' in Windows Update to launch the ESU wizard



Choose which folders to back up to OneDrive or just sync your settings

Enroll in Extended Security Updates
You're eligible to enroll in Extended Security Updates at no extra cost
Extended Security Updates
Valid until October 13, 2026
No extra cost
Enroll
Go back
Enroll

Once you've turned on Windows Backup you can enroll for ESU

If you're already a Microsoft 365 subscriber, and you use Windows Backup to sync to OneDrive, you'll continue to receive support for Windows 10 until October 2026 without paying extra. If you use another online-storage service such as Google Drive, you could split your backups between that and OneDrive to avoid exceeding the 5GB quota. Google Drive for Desktop (www.snipca.com/55208) can sync the same folders as OneDrive.

However, the best workaround is to avoid backing up files and folders altogether. Microsoft only requires you to sync your Windows settings to OneDrive to qualify for its ESU scheme – backing up personal files is entirely optional.

Enroll for ESU using Windows Backup

In August, Microsoft began rolling out its enrollment 'wizard' for Extended Security Updates. To get it, your PC must be running Windows 10 22H2 with the latest update installed. This tool gives you several options for extending support, including enabling Windows Backup.

Windows 10 should show a notification when the ESU wizard is available on your PC. If you don't see this, open the Settings app, choose 'Update & Security' then Windows Update and look for a message saying 'Windows 10 support ends in October 2025. Enroll in Extended Security Updates to help keep your devices secure'.

Click the 'Enroll now' link (see screenshot below left) to open the ESU wizard, then click Next and enter your PC's password or PIN. You should now see three options: 'Back up your PC Settings', 'Redeem Microsoft Reward points' and 'One time purchase'.

Select the first one and sign into your Microsoft account, if you haven't already. Follow the instructions to configure Windows Backup and enroll in the ESU scheme. You'll see a confirmation message on the Windows Update screen.

To save time, turn on Windows Backup before you run the ESU wizard – or if you can't yet see the 'Enroll now' link. Select 'Windows Back up' in the Start menu - or type back up in the Search box and open the tool – then click 'Back up this PC'.

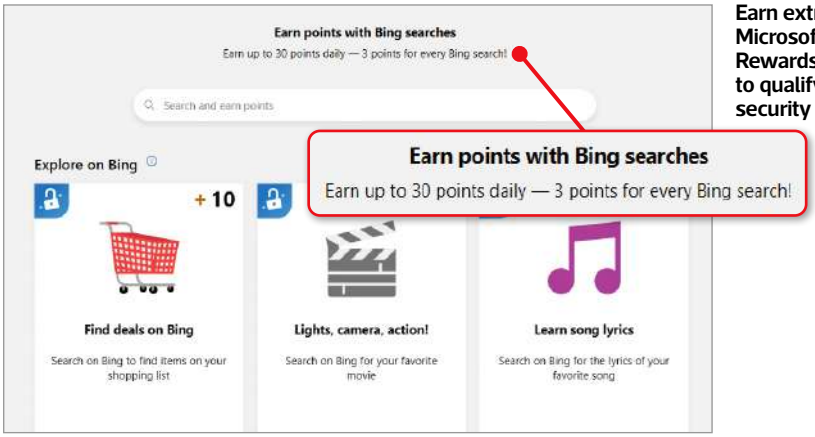
Open the Folders list (1 in our screenshot above left) and choose the folders you want to back up, such as Desktop, Documents and Pictures. As mentioned earlier, if their contents exceed OneDrive's 5GB of free storage – check the 'Storage estimate' in the bottom-left corner 2 – open File Explorer and move less-important items to other folders. Alternatively, simply back up your settings 3 to qualify for ESU. Click 'Continue' then 'Back up now'.

When you run the ESU wizard, it will detect you've enabled Windows Backup for One Drive, and are eligible to enroll for Extended Security Updates "at no extra cost". Click 'Enroll' (see screenshot above) to keep using Windows 10 safely until 13 October 2026.

OPTION 2 REDEEM YOUR MICROSOFT REWARDS POINTS

As we mentioned on page 51, the other free option for enrolling for Extended Security Updates is to redeem your Microsoft Rewards points. You need 1,000 points to qualify for Windows 10 ESU, which isn't actually that many. Redeeming points for a £5 Amazon gift card, for example, requires 8,000.

If you regularly search with Bing, through its website, mobile app or the Edge browser, while signed into your Microsoft account, you may have more Rewards points than you realise. There are several ways to check your balance: it's displayed under Rewards on the Home screen of the Windows Settings app (see screenshot below), in the top-right corner of the Bing homepage and when you click your profile icon in Edge's top-right corner.

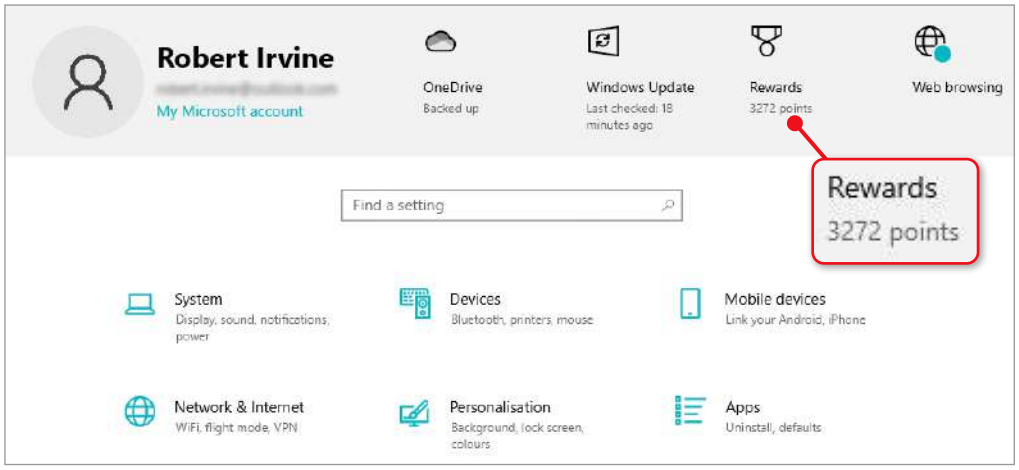

Earn points with Bing searches
Earn up to 30 points daily — 3 points for every Bing search!
Search and earn points
Explore on Bing
+10
Find deals on Bing
Search on Bing to find items on your shopping list
Lights, camera, action!
Search on Bing for your favorite movie
Learn song lyrics
Search on Bing for the lyrics of your favorite song
Earn points with Bing searches
Earn up to 30 points daily — 3 points for every Bing search!

Earn extra Microsoft Rewards points to qualify for free security updates

Visit the Microsoft Rewards website (www.snipca.com/55996) to boost your balance to over 1,000 points by taking part in various activities. These include quizzes, games and polls (from 5 to 30 points each); installing the 'Microsoft Bing Search with Rewards' extension (30 points); and searching with Bing (up to 30 points per day – see screenshot above).

To redeem your points, choose that option in the ESU wizard, sign into your Microsoft account if prompted and confirm the points deduction from your balance. This covers a year of free security updates for Windows 10, it's not a discount or partial credit.

Note that you won't see the 'Rewards points' ESU option if you've enabled Windows Backup - even if you haven't used it to enroll. To make it appear, select Accounts in the Settings app, choose 'Windows backup' and switch off 'Remember my preferences'.



Check your Rewards points balance to see if you have enough for free ESU

OPTION 3 PAY MICROSOFT FOR SECURITY UPDATES

Paying $30 (about £25 inc VAT) to enroll in the ESU scheme may seem silly when – thanks to Microsoft's change of heart in June – you can do so for free using the other two options. But it's worth considering if you don't want to sync data to OneDrive through Windows Backup, or you don't have enough Microsoft Rewards points.

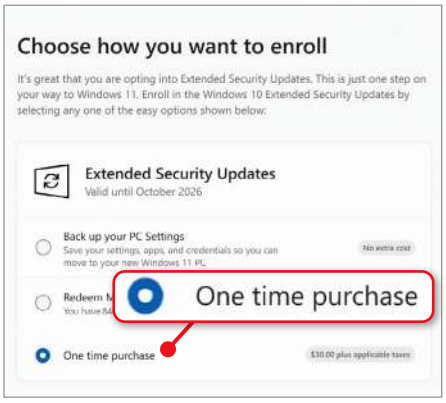
It means you'll receive security updates via Windows Update as soon as they're available for your PC, from the most trustworthy source. The £25 price is less than half the £60 (plus VAT) Microsoft is charging businesses and organisations for the first year of extended support.

Although they – unlike individuals – have the option to pay for three years of ESU, the price doubles every year so will cost £240 (£288 inc VAT) by the third year.

The ESU licence covers up to 10 Windows 10 devices on which you're signed into your Microsoft account, so the £25 is pretty good value. However, the same is true of the free enrolment methods, which makes it an unnecessary expense.

If you'd still prefer to pay, just in case Microsoft introduces a catch for the OneDrive or Rewards points options, click 'Enrol now' in Windows Update to launch the ESU wizard. Select 'One-time purchase' (see screenshot right) and sign into your Microsoft account.

You'll be taken to a secure Microsoft checkout page, where you can pay for Extended Security Updates until October 2026 using the payment method of your choice. Once the payment is processed, you'll see enrolment confirmation on the Windows Update page.


Choose how you want to enroll
It's great that you are opting into Extended Security Updates. This is just one step on your way to Windows 11. Enroll in the Windows 10 Extended Security Updates by selecting any one of the easy options shown below:
Extended Security Updates
Valid until October 2026
Back up your PC Settings
Save your settings, apps, and credentials so you can move to your new Windows 11 PC.
No extra cost
Redeem M
One time purchase
One time purchase
$30.00 plus applicable taxes

You can pay for Extended Security Updates, but it's not necessary

OPTION 4 PAY 0PATCH FOR SECURITY PATCHES

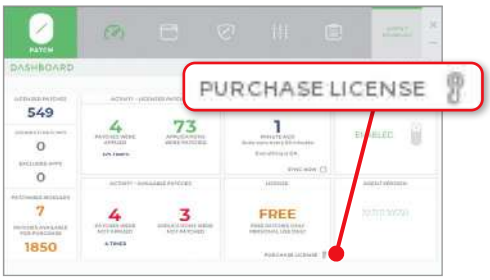
Microsoft's free and cheap options for extending Windows 10 support are very welcome. They alleviate anxiety about the security of your PC after 14 October, if you're unable or unwilling to upgrade to Windows 11.

However, as Microsoft says, Extended Security Updates are "not meant to be a long-term solution" – they merely give you another year to decide what to do. If that's not long enough, or you're unable to enrol for ESU, you can pay for security updates from 0patch (www.snipca.com/56000).

This Slovenian company is offering Windows 10 users five years of critical security patches until October 2030 (see screenshot above right). That's four years more than Microsoft's ESU program and 0patch says patches will be offered for "even longer if there's demand".

These updates will be available to individuals and small businesses who sign up for 0patch's Pro plan. This costs €24.95 annually, which works out at £25.85 once VAT is added. Although that's slightly more expensive than

0patch will provide security patches for Windows 10 until October 2030



Download the 0patch Agent then buy a Pro licence to get updates

Microsoft's ESU, it's a fixed price that won't increase – let alone double – after the first year, which will apply to Windows 10 business customers on ESU.

With an 0patch subscription, you'll receive 'micropatches' for security vulnerabilities that could be exploited by hackers after Windows 10 support ends. These small patches will be automatically applied to running processes in your PC's memory without modifying any system files. You won't need to reboot your PC, and 0patch claims you probably "won't even notice" a patch has been installed.

To get security patches from 0patch until October 2030 and potentially beyond, you need to sign up for a free account and download its 0patch Agent tool. When 14 October approaches, purchase an 0patch Pro licence (see screenshot above), install your last official Windows updates and let 0patch handle all future patching.

On the downside, 0patch Pro only provides updates for one computer, whereas ESU covers up to 10. There's also a chance Microsoft could extend free support again in October 2026. But for peace of mind, it's currently the safest and most reliable unofficial option.

OPTION 5 BLOCK UPGRADES TO WINDOWS 11

Whether you get your security updates from Microsoft or 0patch, or risk using Windows 10 unpatched after 14 October, you're still likely to see 'reminders' to upgrade to Windows 11. These nags have become increasingly difficult to decline, with tiny 'Keep Windows 10' and 'Remind me later' links, and they're likely to get worse.

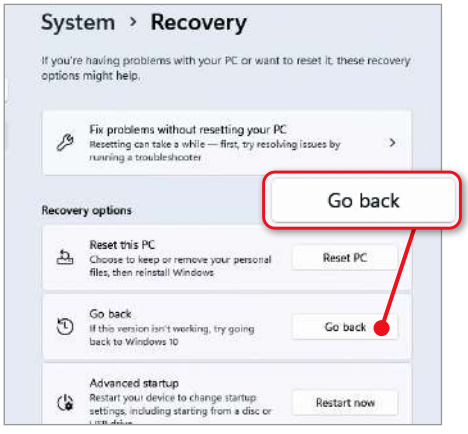
There's also a danger you'll click the download button by accident and install Windows 11 without wanting to. A bigger fear is that Microsoft will install it automatically if your PC meets the system requirements.

You can safeguard your PC against an accidental upgrade by installing GRC InControl (www.snipca.com/56008). This free tool keeps your Windows version at the current release by tweaking registry settings to disable updates.

Of course, Windows 10 won't receive any updates after 14 October, but Microsoft will still check which Windows version PCs are running and target them with upgrade reminders. GRC says InControl will continue to work "even after the current version and feature release has gone out of support".

InControl: Of Windows updating and upgrading
InControl
Version 1.0.2
Control Microsoft's automatic unwanted updating and upgrading of Windows.
Freeware by Steve Gibson (@SGgrc).
OS upgrades are not under your control on this system!
This system may be upgraded / updated without your permission.
If you wish to take control of this system's updating and upgrading, press the "Take Control" button below to take control.
For more information see the InControl web page
See GRC's InControl web page at: https://grc.com/incontrol.htm for a full explanation of the use and operation of this freeware utility.
Version / Release
10
22H2
Take Control
Exit
1
10
22H2
Take Control
2

GRC InControl stops Microsoft upgrading your PC to Windows 11


System › Recovery
If you're having problems with your PC or want to reset it, these recovery options might help.
Fix problems without resetting your PC
Resetting can take a while — first, try resolving issues by running a troubleshooter
Recovery options
Go back
Reset this PC
Choose to keep or remove your personal files, then reinstall Windows
Reset PC
Go back
If this version isn't working, try going back to Windows 10
Go back
Advanced startup
Restart your device to change startup settings, including starting from a disc or
Restart now

Roll back to Windows 10 if your PC is upgraded to Windows 11

When you run InControl, it will show your Windows version in the bottom-left corner (1 in our screenshot above). Click the Take Control button 2 and the program will confirm that 'You are in control of OS upgrades on this system'. This will stop Microsoft automatically upgrading your Windows 10 PC to Windows 11. Click 'Release Control' if later you decide you want to upgrade.

InControl won't block all nagging messages, such as those that appear in the Settings app and notification area, but you won't be forcibly upgraded to Windows 11 without your consent. If that does happen (perhaps because another user on your PC does it), remember you have 10 days to roll back to Windows 10. Open the Settings app in Windows 11 and click System then Recovery. Click the 'Go back' button under 'Recovery options' (see screenshot above) to 'downgrade' to Windows 10.

Computer active

READER OFFER!

ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

Upgrade to Windows 11 Pro for just £49.99!

Your PC almost certainly came with Windows 11 Home. But did you know it's easy to upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** to get advanced features like BitLocker drive encryption?

There's no need to install a new version of Windows – just take your new Professional key, go to System, Activate, then select 'Change Product Key'.

To upgrade, visit **www.snipca.com/50563** and click the red **Buy Now** button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

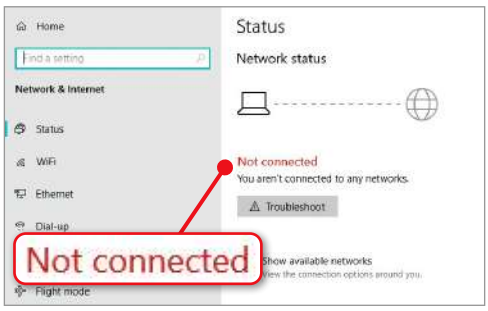
This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **23 September, 2025**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

OPTION 6 ONLY USE YOUR WINDOWS 10 PC OFFLINE

Your Windows 10 PC will continue to function as normal after 14 October – it just won't receive security updates. Although you're unlikely to be deluged with malware the moment support ends, your system will be vulnerable to new threats and unpatched weaknesses in the operating system every time you go online.

An obvious remedy would be to use your PC offline only. This would stop malware reaching your PC from the web, prevent hackers from infiltrating your system and confine your data to your hard drive so no one can steal it in transit.

In practice, you're likely to find running your PC offline highly frustrating, with the drawbacks far outweighing the safety benefits. Once you've disconnected from Wi-Fi and unplugged the Ethernet cable (see screenshot above), your choice of activities will be extremely limited.



Using your Windows PC offline is feasible but will prove frustrating

Without the internet, you won't be able to use email, browse the web, download files, stream videos or access online services. Nor will it be possible to update your software and drivers.

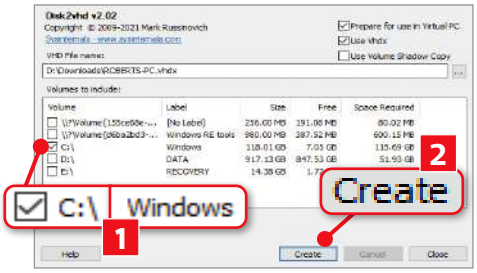
Admittedly, there are plenty of things you *can* do offline, such as writing documents, editing photos and playing music, videos and games stored on your hard drive. You won't be distracted or interrupted by the web, and there won't be any background connections hogging your RAM. But you won't be able to share files without copying them to a USB stick, which could itself spread malware to your unpatched PC.

The offline option is only feasible if your Windows 10 PC is a secondary computer you use occasionally, and it isn't a long-term solution for your main computer.

OPTION 7 RUN WINDOWS 10 IN A VIRTUAL MACHINE

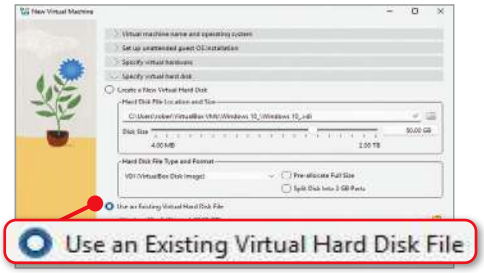
It's no substitute for having Windows 10 installed on your PC, but by running the operating system in a virtual machine you can continue to use it safely. Use the free tool Disk2vhd (www.snipca.com/56012) to clone your Windows 10 installation to a virtual hard disk (VHD), then run it in VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org) in Windows 11. It will retain all your programs, files and settings so you can pick up where you left off.

Download Disk2vhd, extract the contents of its ZIP file and double-click 'diskvhd64.exe'. Select the drives and partitions you want to clone – most importantly your C: drive where Windows is stored (1 in our screenshot above), and select a folder in which to save the VHD file. It will be very large, so use a high-capacity USB stick.



Clone Windows 10 to a virtual hard disk to run it in a virtual machine

Click 'Create' and Disk2vhd will clone your Windows 10 system to a virtual disk.



Use VirtualBox to run your clone of Windows 10 in Windows 11

Copy the file to your Windows 11 PC and download VirtualBox. Install the program then click Preferences and switch to Expert mode.

Click the New button, enter a name for the virtual machine and choose 'Windows 10 (64-bit)' in the OS Version dropdown menu. Open the 'Specify virtual hard disk' section, select 'Use an Existing Virtual Hard Disk File' (see screenshot above) and browse to your Windows 10 VHD. Click 'Finish' then double-click the virtual machine to switch it on and run Windows 10.

The program may ask you to enter your Windows 10 product key. This poses a problem because it's tied to your PC and can't be used on other PCs – even virtual ones. Choose 'I don't have a product key' to use Windows 10 unactivated.

You can try fixing this by opening the Settings app in the virtualised Windows 10 and choosing 'Update & Security' then Activation. Select 'Troubleshoot' and run the Activation troubleshooter.

What about Windows 10 LTSC?

You may have read about an option for extending Windows 10 support called Long Term Servicing Channel (LTSC) 2021. This is a special Enterprise edition of Windows 10 aimed at businesses and organisations, which use it for medical equipment, manufacturing hardware, cash machines and many other purposes.

LTSC 2021 has no Microsoft Store, Outlook, Copilot or many other Microsoft apps, and so provides a more streamlined and stable version of the operating system. However, its biggest benefit is that it will continue to receive security updates until 2029 (2032 in its IoT version – see www.snipca.com/56053).

We were tempted to include LTSC here, but it's not a viable option for home PC users. To legitimately run Windows 10 LTSC, you need to buy a licence from an authorised Microsoft Partner and, even then, the licence agreement does not allow for use on personal computers.

So if you come across any tools that install Windows 10 LTSC 2021 on your PC, be wary. Not only does acquiring and activating an unofficial licence violate Microsoft's licence agreement, but you also won't be able to use some software or upgrade to Windows 11 later.

OPTION 8 SWITCH TO LINUX AND KEEP YOUR PC

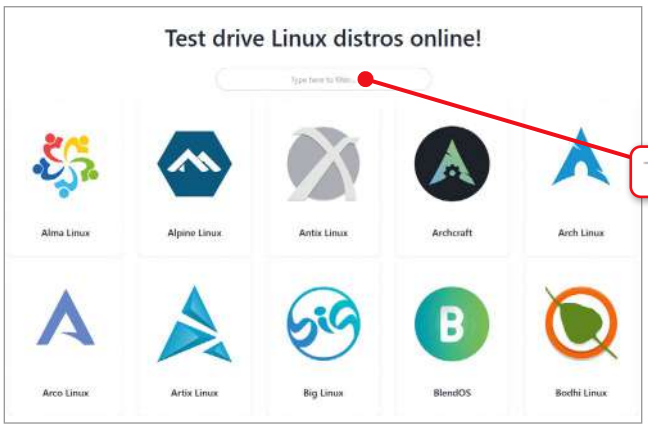
If your PC doesn't meet Windows 11's system requirements but you can't afford to buy a new one, switching to Linux will extend its life without end-of-support concerns. Contrary to popular belief, Linux isn't only for tech boffins.

Some distros (distributions) look and work much like Windows 10, with a Start menu, taskbar, file manager and customisable desktop. Many popular free programs are available for Linux, including web browsers, image editors, video players, office suites and more.

Before you download a Linux ISO, visit DistroSea (www.distrosea.com – see screenshot above right). This website lets you test-drive virtual versions of dozens of Linux distros without installing any software. Select a distro then the latest version, click Start and it will load in your browser. With popular distros, the site may place you in a queue. You should also disable your ad blocker.

Once the distro has loaded, you can explore its interface, features and settings to decide whether to install the real thing. To visit websites in a virtual distro, sign into DistroSea using your Google account.

In our 'Should you ditch Windows 10 for Linux?' feature in Issue 711 (page 60), we recommended Zorin OS (www.snipca.com/56019) and Linux Mint (www.snipca.com/56020) as the best free options for Linux novices moving from Windows 10 – both are available to try on DistroSea. Zorin even has a page explaining why it's the "ideal replacement for Windows 10" (www.snipca.com/56021).



DistroSea lets you try dozens of Linux distros before you download them – use the search box to find the one you want

To install either distro, download its ISO file (make sure it's the free edition) and use Rufus (www.snipca.com/55674) to create a bootable USB drive – you'll need a USB stick with at least 8GB of storage. Set your PC to boot from USB – see our Cover Feature in Issue 716 (page 51) for instructions – and choose the option to try Zorin OS or Linux Mint without installing it. If you like the distro, you can then choose the Install option and make it your new operating system.

Dual-boot Windows 10 and Linux

If that feels like too bold a step, you can dual-boot the two operating systems. This will let you use Linux for online tasks and Windows 10 for everything else, switching between them as required.

Zorin OS and Linux Mint simplify the technical task of setting up dual-booting by offering an 'Install alongside Windows' option in their installers. This creates a partition for the Linux distro on your hard drive and installs it beside Windows. When you start your PC, you'll see a boot menu that lets you choose between the two operating systems.

If you don't see that option, you'll need to create a partition yourself. Press Windows key+X and select Disk Management. Right-click your main drive, choose Shrink Volume and specify how much space to allocate to the distro – at least 20GB is recommended.

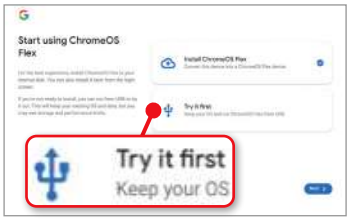
Click 'Shrink' to create the space, then right-click it and choose New Simple Volume. When you run the installer for the distro, you should now see an option to 'Install alongside Windows Boot Manager'.

Zorin OS, Linux Mint and most other distros receive security and software updates directly from their developers, with no end of support to worry about – new versions are regularly released. They come with a built-in update manager that checks daily, or on boot, for new updates and installs them automatically. You can double-check under 'Software & Updates' in Zorin OS or in Update Manager in Linux Mint (see screenshot below).

Linux distros such as Linux Mint install security updates automatically

Should you switch to ChromeOS Flex?

ChromeOS Flex (www.snipca.com/56027) offers another free way to extend your PC's life. It's a fast, lightweight operating system that's easy to use and runs on virtually any computer with 4GB of RAM, 16GB of storage and a 64bit processor.



Google constantly updates ChromeOS Flex to protect you from the latest online threats. However, there are a few caveats that make it less than ideal as a Windows 10 replacement.

Unlike Linux, you can't dual-boot ChromeOS Flex, so installing it wipes everything on your hard drive including all your software and files. You can try it first (see screenshot) by running it from a USB stick.

If you do install ChromeOS Flex, you're likely to miss your favourite programs. You're limited to web apps, which aren't as numerous or sophisticated as Windows software – and unlike on a Chromebook, you can't use Android apps.

What's more, Google may have ended ChromeOS Flex support for your PC – check at www.snipca.com/56028. For all those reasons, we recommend only using ChromeOS Flex on a secondary Windows 10 PC rather than your main one.

OPTION 9 FORCE WINDOWS 10 TO UPGRADE

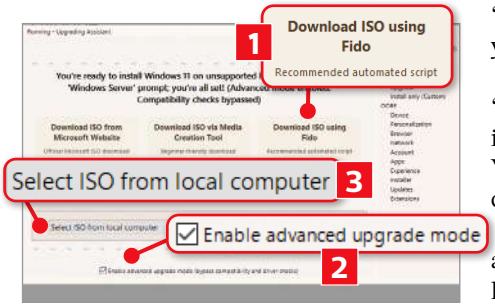
If you're only sticking with Windows 10 after 14 October because Microsoft won't let you upgrade, there is a solution. The free tool Flyoobe (www.snipca.com/56031) bypasses the minimum-requirements restriction to install Windows 11 on unsupported PCs, while retaining files and settings.

It works by using the installation setup for Windows Server. This doesn't check whether a PC has the correct specifications for running Windows 11, and Flyoobe exploits that loophole to install the operating system. However, it can't bypass the PopCnt requirement (see www.snipca.com/56039), so may not work on PCs with older processors – Flyoobe performs a compatibility check to confirm you'll be able to upgrade.

Download the latest version from www.snipca.com/56032, extract the contents of the ZIP file and double-click 'Flyo.exe'. The program triggers a SmartScreen warning, but VirusTotal gives it a clean bill of health (www.snipca.com/56030), so click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

Flyoobe gives you three options. You can download an ISO file from Microsoft, via the Media Creation Tool or using Fido (from the developer of Rufus). The latter option (1 in our screenshot below) is the easiest – click 'Yes' to allow PowerShell to make changes to your device, and download and run the Fido script.

When the 'Fido - ISO Downloader' box opens, select Windows 11 in the dropdown menu and choose 24H2. Set the Windows edition, language (select English International) and architecture, then click Download.



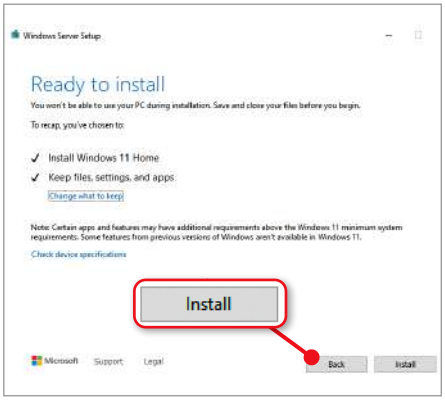
Use Flyoobe to bypass compatibility checks and upgrade to Windows 11

The ISO file is 5.4GB so will take a while to download. Once complete, tick the 'Enable advanced upgrade mode' box 2 to bypass compatibility and driver checks, choose 'Select ISO from local computer' in the dropdown menu 3 and browse to the file you downloaded. Flyoobe will 'mount' the ISO and display a message saying you can now proceed with Windows 11 installation.

Follow the setup steps and click Accept on the Windows Server Setup screen. Choose either 'Keep files, settings and apps' or 'Keep personal files only'. Click 'Next' and Windows Server will confirm your PC is ready to install Windows 11.

On the 'Ready to install' screen, click 'Install' (see screenshot above right) to install Windows Server and Windows 11. Your PC will need to restart a few times to complete the upgrade.

The Windows 11 installer will automatically detect and apply the digital licence for your computer, so you won't need to enter a product key. To have it to hand just in case, before running Flyoobe type the following into Command Prompt and press Enter: wmic path SoftwareLicensingService get OA3xOriginalProductKey. You can copy that command from our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/56033.



Flyoobe lets you keep your files, settings and apps when you upgrade

We successfully upgraded our old PC to Windows 11 using Flyoobe and were able to install the latest security updates. We were also able to roll back to Windows 10.

As a precaution, you can use Hasleo Backup Suite (www.snipca.com/56040) to back up your Windows 10 system before you upgrade. ca

Will your favourite software stop working?

When Microsoft ends support for a version of Windows, many software developers follow suit – but not for a few years. Microsoft says its own Edge browser will continue to receive updates on Windows 10 until "at least October 2028", regardless of whether you're on the ESU scheme.

The same applies to other browsers. Google continued to update Chrome for Windows 7 until January 2023 – three years after its end-of-support date – while Mozilla only stopped updating Firefox for Windows 7 last September.

There are still plenty of programs that work on Windows 7 and 8.1, so we wouldn't worry about your favourite Windows 10 tools ceasing to work and update after 14 October. The main exception is Microsoft 365 apps, which will stop receiving feature updates, though they'll still get security patches.

A bigger concern is that Microsoft Defender Antivirus won't get security updates, though we won't be surprised if Microsoft changes its mind. Third-party antivirus such as Norton will keep protecting your Windows 10 PC, but can't fix vulnerabilities in the operating system.

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DITCH streaming for DVD and Blu-ray

Fed up with rising costs and shrinking choice on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and other streaming services? **Jonathan Parkyn** explains why it's time to rediscover the joys of physical media

Not so long ago, streaming services felt like the future. Cheap, convenient and offering an apparently endless supply of films and TV shows, they promised a golden age of unlimited entertainment. Fast-forward to today, and the picture isn't quite so rosy, for reasons we'll explain.

The solution is refreshingly old fashioned – simply cancel your expensive streaming subscriptions and go back to watching DVDs and Blu-rays. This might feel like a technological step backwards, but discs are cheap, plentiful and may even look and sound better than their streaming equivalents. You can pick exactly what you want, get to own films and shows you love and keep them forever – plus you'll enjoy movies without interruptions from annoying ads.

What's gone wrong with streaming?

The most obvious problem with streaming services is their increasing cost. Standard Netflix and Amazon Prime Video subscriptions used to be relatively affordable. But streaming platforms have hiked their prices to the point where many 'standard' subscription plans now cost more than double what they did only a few years ago.

It doesn't help that the streaming market has become so overcrowded, with Disney+, Apple TV+, Now, Paramount+ and more all jostling for your monthly direct debit. Sign up to everything and you'd easily end up paying well over £100 a month.

Despite charging more, however, many streamers now seem to deliver much less value. Netflix, Disney+ and others have introduced adverts (even in paid-for tiers) and often downgrade picture quality on the cheaper plans. If you want a truly ad-free, high-quality viewing experience, you'll have to stump up even more money every month for a pricey 'premium' plan.

On top of that, catalogues are shrinking – Netflix's library alone has lost thousands of titles since its 2015 peak – and films or series on your watch list can often vanish overnight. Paradoxically, it now feels harder than ever to find something worth watching, without having to scroll through a heap of filler driven by algorithms and forgettable content.

It's easy to feel that streaming is past its prime. But perhaps the answer has been sitting under your TV all along.

Dig out your old DVD or Blu-ray player

With a bit of luck, you never got rid of your old DVD or Blu-ray player. Maybe you kept it to play a few old favourites or home movies you own on disc, or perhaps it has just been gathering dust in your loft or garage all these years.

If you've still got a player in your house, you'll need to check it still works properly. If it no longer turns on, then you're probably out of luck.

Clean the lens of your old DVD player to get it working properly again

If it skips or freezes mid-movie, you may be able to fix it with a cheap lens cleaning kit (pictured left) that's available from Amazon for just £7 (www.snipca.com/56041). Though if there's a more serious playback issue that requires a repair, this may end up costing more than the player's worth.

Even if you no longer have a functioning DVD player, you may already own something else that does the job. Most PlayStation and Xbox games consoles double as DVD or Blu-ray players, and an older PC with an optical drive can play movies from discs.

Check connections and compatibility

HDMI is the most common method of connecting devices to modern TVs. Most DVD and Blu-ray players (and games consoles) should be equipped with an HDMI output socket, but some older players only offer Scart. If that's the case, all is not lost – a simple Scart-to-HDMI adapter, like the one pictured above right (£13 from www.snipca.com/56042), may be all you need to hook up the player to your TV set. Just be aware, you won't

Connect an old DVD player to your TV with a Scart-to-HDMI adapter

always get the best picture quality using the Scart connection.

It's also worth double-checking which disc formats your player is compatible with. A basic player will only play DVDs at standard-definition quality (720x576 pixels). A Blu-ray player will play Blu-rays in HD (1080p), but will also be backwards-compatible with DVDs. Some newer players also support 4K Ultra HD discs, which we'll get to in a moment.

Buy a new disc player

If your old player really is beyond saving, don't worry – you can still buy brand new Blu-ray players. Fewer manufacturers make them these days, but there's still a healthy choice across a range of budgets.

Stick with trusted brands – Sony and Panasonic are two of the better-known manufacturers still in the market. If you just want something simple and affordable, the Sony BDP-S1700 (£79 from www.snipca.com/56034, pictured below) is worth considering. It plays Blu-rays and DVDs, has HDMI output and its compact design means it won't take up much shelf space. Panasonic's DMP-BD84EB-K Blu-ray/DVD player (£71 from www.snipca.com/56035) is another basic, affordable option.

If you're looking for the best possible image quality, consider stepping up to a 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray player. These play ultra-high-definition Blu-ray discs with 4K resolution picture quality, plus support for HDR (high dynamic range) and superior audio formats. Predictably, this bump ups the price tag quite a bit. Prices start at about £159 for Panasonic's DP-UB150EB-K (www.snipca.com/56036). Sony's current entry-level UHD model is the UBP-X700 (£270 from www.snipca.com/56037). Both deliver excellent image quality, though the Sony goes one better by adding support for Dolby Vision.

The compact Sony BDP-S1700 can play DVDs and Blu-rays

Where to get discs from

Once you've got your player set up, you'll need to find some discs to play on it. The good news is that big-name retailers including Amazon, Zavvi and HMV continue to do a roaring trade in physical media.

Bargain hunters are especially well catered for. On Amazon, for example, be sure to check the 'Other sellers' box in the right-hand column to see if a used copy of the disc you want is being offered cheaper. CeX shops carry shelves of DVDs and Blu-rays for just a couple of quid each – or you can order them through the company's website (www.snipca.com/56043).

Charity shops are usually well stocked with DVDs at £1 a pop, though Blu-rays tend to be a little rarer.

On eBay, you can pick up individual titles for a few pounds or in bulk for next to nothing. Bear in mind that used discs may be scratched or chipped, which may affect playback – though most outlets will happily refund you if a disc won't play.

It's still just about possible to rent movies on disc in the way you could from Blockbuster, for example. Cinema Paradiso (www.cinemaparadiso.co.uk, see screenshot above) continues to offer a traditional postal DVD and Blu-ray rental service in the UK, with unlimited plans starting from £24 a month, and a vast catalogue of new and classic titles in DVD, Blu-ray and UHD formats.

It's worth checking your local library, too. Many UK libraries still lend DVD films and TV shows. ca

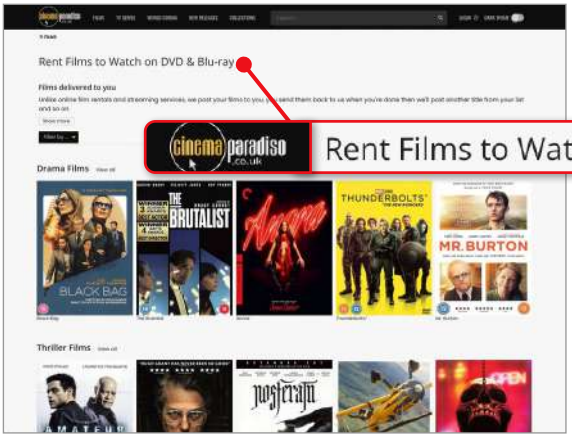
Create your own DVDs legally

Another way to take advantage of your old DVD/Blu-ray player is to create discs of your own. You might, for example, want to turn family videos, slideshows or home movies into DVDs you can play on your living-room TV. You can also burn discs of copyright-free films and TV shows, such as public-domain titles from the Internet Archive (www.archive.org).

You'll need a computer with a disc burner to do this – few modern PCs have them, but you can get a basic external USB DVD burner for £23 at www.snipca.com/56044.

Let's say you want to make your own DVD copy of Alfred Hitchcock's 1929 film *Blackmail*, which entered the public domain in January. Go to www.snipca.com/56045, click the Download button next to MPEG-4, then click the three-dot icon and choose Download (see screenshot).

Now install DVDStyler (www.snipca.com/55661). Launch it and leave the project defaults unchanged. Enter a title, select a DVD menu template then drag the movie file you downloaded from Internet Archive into the timeline below the main preview. Click the Burn button, select Burn, make sure your DVD burner is selected under Device, then click Start.



Cinema Paradiso is the only remaining UK service for renting DVDs and Blu-rays by post

Don't use the wrong battery

If your laptop, PC or phone battery is dying you'll need to find a replacement. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains how to spot the signs of failure and avoid dangerous fakes

Replace your laptop battery

The clearest sign a laptop battery is failing is if it no longer holds a full charge for as long as it used to. Other clues include sudden shutdowns when the battery still shows charge, an unusually hot chassis, or bulges and warping in the case. Batteries in poor health can leak or fail completely, potentially damaging your laptop.

You can check your battery's health in Command Prompt. Click Start, type cmd, then right-click the Command Prompt result and choose 'Run as administrator'. At the prompt, type powercfg /batteryreport (1 in our screenshot below) and press Enter. This generates a 'battery-report.html' file showing your battery's health, usually saved under **C:\Users\your username** or **C:\Windows\system32**, as indicated in the Command Prompt window 2.

Locate the file on your computer and double-click to open it. Focus on 'Battery capacity history', which shows the battery's designed charge (Design Capacity – 1 in our screenshot below) versus what it can currently hold (Full Charge Capacity 2) in mWh. While there's no universal threshold, consider a replacement when it falls to around 50–60 per cent. Check your manufacturer's guidance for model-specific advice.

The report also has an 'Installed batteries' section, showing the manufacturer and chemistry type. Alone, these may not give an exact part number, but combined with your laptop's make and model, they can help you find the correct replacement.

Replace your desktop PC's CMOS battery

Desktop PCs have a small CMOS battery powering a chip on the motherboard that stores key settings, including the real-time clock and basic system configuration. Signs it's starting to fail include the PC losing track of date and time; BIOS or system-configuration errors at startup; or repeated prompts to press a key to continue booting.

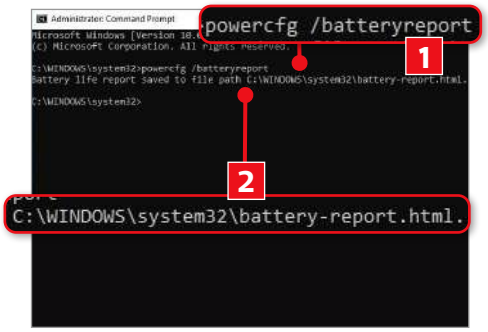
Most CMOS batteries in PCs are standard CR2032 models

In most cases, the CMOS battery is a standard CR2032 coin cell (pictured above), like you'll find in watches and car-key fobs – though, some systems may use a CR2025 or CR2016 instead. All are easy to buy online or in supermarkets.

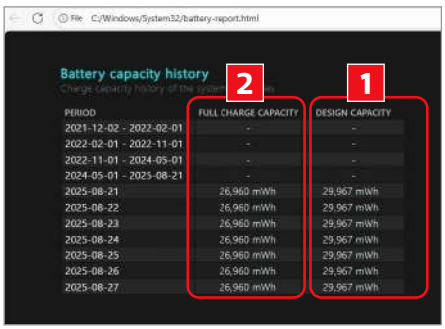
To replace the CMOS battery, switch off your PC, open the case and locate the round silver battery on the motherboard. Note the battery type (printed on top), then swap it for a fresh one of the same kind. You may need to reset the clock or adjust BIOS settings once you've restarted.

Replace your phone or tablet's battery

The same symptoms of a failing laptop battery affect phones and tablets. You can check your battery's health on an iPhone or iPad by tapping Settings, Battery, then Battery Health. Here you'll see the Maximum Capacity figure, which shows how much charge your battery can now hold compared with when it was new. Apple typically recommends considering a replacement once this drops below



Generate a battery report for your laptop using Command Prompt



Check your battery's Design Charge with what it can currently hold (Full Charge Capacity)

80 per cent.

On Android, options often vary by manufacturer, but you'll usually find information about your device's battery condition under Settings, then Battery.

Android users can also install third-party apps, such as AccuBattery (www.snipca.com/56097). You may need to change some of your device's settings in order for AccuBattery to work. Launch the app and tap the Battery Health tab. If you see a warning at the top of the screen, tap it and follow the instructions to allow the app unrestricted access to your battery. You'll also need to fully charge your device at least once before the app can estimate your battery health.

Will your manufacturer replace your battery?

If your battery fails while your device is still under warranty, you might qualify for a free replacement. This is unlikely though because batteries usually start wearing out long after your device's warranty expires. But it's worth checking, especially if you've taken out extended coverage. Apple, for example, offers free replacement iPhone batteries under AppleCare+ if your existing battery's capacity drops below 80 per cent (see www.snipca.com/56101).

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, if a fault appears within six months of purchase the retailer has to prove the problem wasn't inherent. That said, battery degradation is usually considered wear and tear, not a manufacturing defect. So, unless the battery is faulty from the outset, it's unlikely to be covered by law.

Outside of cover, you may be able to get your manufacturer to replace your battery for a fee. Policies and prices vary, so check your device's support website. To give you an idea, Apple's UK battery service currently costs between £65 for older iPhones and £95 for newer models. Samsung and other manufacturers, including Dell, HP and Asus also offer official paid-for replacement services, but prices vary depending on the device.

Can you replace it yourself?

If you have the necessary confidence and know-how, you can carry out the replacement yourself. The best place to start is iFixit (www.ifixit.com), which provides repair kits for many types of device – click Store, then Parts on the homepage and look for your model.

These kits include not only the battery itself, but also all the necessary tools and cables. You'll also find a link to a detailed step-by-step guide to carrying out the repair.

However, in many cases this process can be fiddly, may void any remaining warranty and carries a real risk of causing damage. Taking your device to a local repair shop could be a safer option. Prices vary, but expect to pay somewhere between £50–£150, depending on the device and the shop itself. It's worth noting that some shops use cheaper third-party batteries to keep costs down. For peace of mind, you could find an official replacement battery yourself and ask the shop to fit it for you.

Buy replacement batteries – and avoid fakes

The safest option is to buy directly through your manufacturer's store or customer support. This guarantees compatibility and safety, though it's typically the most expensive route.

Aside from iFixit, there are other online stores that sell 'compatible' replacement batteries, including Duracell Direct (www.snipca.com/56100) and Allbatteries (www.allbatteries.co.uk) - these are often a little cheaper than manufacturer originals.

Amazon and eBay are often cheaper too. The problem is that the market is flooded with fake batteries that perform poorly or fail quickly. In the worst cases, they lack important built-in safety circuitry or use the wrong voltage, and therefore could pose a fire risk.

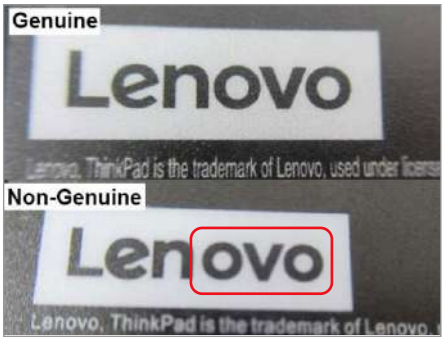
Check a battery's serial number on the manufacturer's website

There are several ways to tell a genuine battery from a dud. For starters, if it's significantly cheaper than the manufacturer's own, it's almost certainly a fake. Also avoid any that don't have a brand name and are listed generically as 'OEM Manufacturer'.

Counterfeit batteries try to mimic the design of the real deal, but there are often small differences that expose them as fakes – so study the packaging and labels carefully. For example, the computer-parts retailer Tekeurope found fake Lenovo batteries which had printed the company's logo with a smaller 'ovo' (pictured above, www.snipca.com/56104).

Different manufacturers use specific design techniques to identify real batteries. HP uses holographic stickers with shifting color bars; Lenovo often prints FRU (Field Replaceable Unit) numbers and anti-tamper tags; while Apple includes engraved model info and barcodes matching system specifications.

And also check the serial number of a battery with what's listed on the manufacturer's site – such as on this genuine Samsung phone battery (pictured left). ca



Credit: Tekeurope

This fake battery is revealed by its slightly altered Lenovo logo

Dispose of old batteries safely

Batteries contain toxic materials and – if damaged – can leak chemicals or even catch fire in household waste or landfill sites, so it's important to dispose of them properly.

Most supermarkets, electrical retailers, DIY stores and council recycling centres now provide bins for old batteries. Some local councils may also collect small electronic items – including batteries – on bin day. Check your council's website to see if this applies where you live.

If your old battery is bulging, cracked or leaking, you should handle it with care. Wear gloves, avoid touching any residue, and place the battery in a plastic bag before taking it for disposal. If the battery is built into your device, don't try to extract it yourself. Instead, recycle the entire device through your council's e-waste collection, a retailer take-back scheme, or your manufacturer's recycling service.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

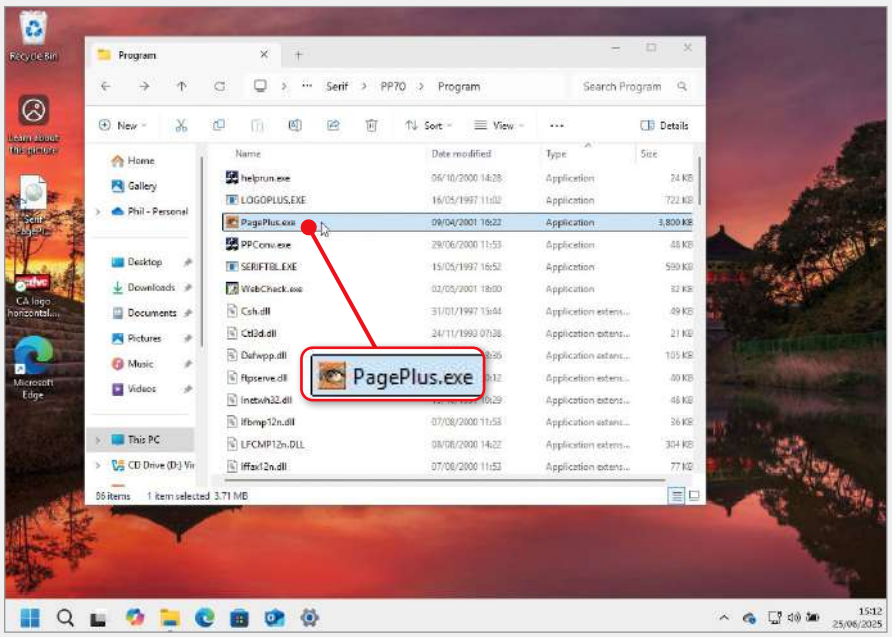
PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I move my old Serif PagePlus 7 program with updates to a new PC?

Q I've been taking your magazine for many years and hope you might be able to help. It looks as though I'm going to have to replace my Windows 10 desktop PC. I'll be able download most of the programs I use, but I still make considerable use of Serif PagePlus 7 desktop publishing software (pictured below).

I have the original disc so I expect I can install it on to the new PC, but between the time the disc was issued and the time PagePlus was discontinued there were many updates that I downloaded. Is there any way I can locate these updates on my old PC so I can add them to the 'factory-fresh' program that I will have installed to the new PC from the CD-ROM?

Peter Wright



Once copied to your new PC launch Serif PagePlus 7 by double-clicking 'PagePlus.exe'

A We get loads of questions about whether or not old versions of software will or can be made to run on new PCs, or new versions of Windows – but yours hits on a particularly interesting aspect. That's because it considers that the setup on your existing PC is different to what's on the original disc. Indeed, with untold updates and patches applied, the factory-fresh version of PagePlus could be significantly less capable than what you currently have installed.

Regardless, the fundamental problem is that PagePlus 7 (not the later X7 version) is 25 years old. Understandably, Serif no longer supports this version. As such, there is no longer any legitimate way to download either the software itself, and still less any of those many updates. And yes, while you might be able to install from the original CD-ROM, that won't get you where you want to be.

Older programs like Serif PagePlus 7 are easier to copy over from an older PC than modern ones

But all might not be lost. Unlike modern programs that tend to deeply integrate with Windows via the registry and hidden support folders, older programs like this were far more self-contained. They typically lived in a single folder and didn't scatter their files around the system the way modern software does.

So your best bet might be to bypass reinstallation altogether. We can offer no guarantees that the program itself will work in a new Windows environment, but you're unlikely to do any harm by copying the original program folder wholesale from your old PC's hard drive to your new one.

To do this, on your old PC, press Windows key+E to open File Explorer then navigate to the program's installation folder – almost certainly at **C:\Program Files (x86)\Serif\PP70**. Copy this entire folder to a USB stick or external drive. Then, on your new PC, paste it into exactly the same location, on your C drive.

Once done, you might need to use File Explorer to navigate to a subfolder inside the Serif or PP70 folders, such as Program. Finally, launch the app by double-clicking the relevant program file, which is likely to be 'PagePlus.exe' (see screenshot above) or similar.

Can I recover a corrupted USB drive?

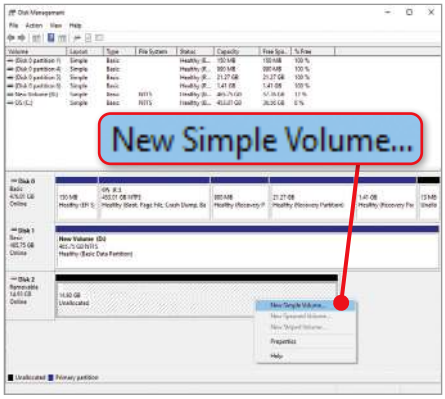
Q Like many others I have suffered from corrupted USB sticks that makes them unreadable. Usually I bite my lip and throw them away. However, recently my wife was too hasty in removing the USB plug from the 1TB external drive I use for backup.

Now the drive is not recognised by any Windows machine. The data on the drive isn't important, but is there any way to recover it?

Roy White

A It's rare that corruption leads to a truly irrecoverable drive, but you might need to carry out a few tricks to make it appear or bring it back to life.

First, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose Disk Management. Look for a drive rectangle labelled 'RAW' or Unallocated'. If the former, first right-click this rectangle and choose Delete Volume. Next, right-click the Unallocated rectangle then choose



In Disk Management right-click the Unallocated section and choose New Simple Volume

New Simple Volume (see screenshot above). Follow the onscreen prompts to reformat the disk and assign it a drive letter.

If this doesn't work, you'll need to use command-line instructions to recover the drive. Open the Quick Link menu again, then in Windows 11, choose either 'Windows Terminal (Admin)' or, in Windows 10, 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. Next, at the command prompt, type diskpart and press Enter. Now type list disk (with the space) and press Enter. Carefully note down the number assigned to the 1TB drive. You can identify this by checking the capacities listed under the Size column.

Next, type select disk X, replacing X with the relevant number for your backup drive. For example, you might need to type select disk 1 or select disk 2 (with both spaces). The next command will instantly and irreversibly wipe the selected drive so, first, double-check that you've earmarked the correct one by once more typing list disk and pressing Enter. The selected drive will be marked by an asterisk.

When you're sure all is correct, type clean and press Enter. Next, type create partition primary (with both spaces) and press Enter. Finally, type format fs=ntfs quick and press Enter. You should now be able to see the drive in Disk Management and do with it what you wish.

How can I secure my CCTV system from previous owners?

Q I am buying a property fitted with CCTV, which is included as part of the purchase. Could you assist with general steps to ensure the previous owner doesn't have remote or any form of access? I'm sure I'm not the first person to have this issue and won't be the last!

Carol Pedder

A This is an interesting question, but in general terms, there's really only one answer – and that's to make sure the system is completely disconnected from mains power and left unused.

Of course, you probably do want to make use of the equipment. In that case, you'll need to investigate how to perform a factory reset of the control unit and/or recording device. If it's a modern, internet-enabled system, download the associated app or create a new online account, and make sure everything is set up from scratch.

Secure existing CCTV systems by carrying out a factory reset

If you're unsure how to do any of this, your only real option is to contact the manufacturer. This might be tricky, because local security firms obviously come and go. If it turns out to be an old (or even custom-built) system, the maker may no longer be in business. In that case, unless you're prepared to take the previous owner's word that they'll have no further access after handover, we're back to where we started: the safest move is to disconnect the system entirely from mains power, and possibly remove it altogether.

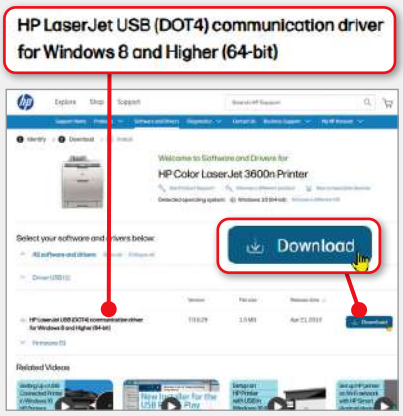
How can I get my old printer to work with my new desktop PC?

Q I have both a Windows 11 desktop PC attached to a colour printer, and an older laptop that was hooked up to an HP LaserJet 3600n printer. Sadly, that laptop has died so I'd like to connect the LaserJet to my desktop PC – but I can't find the relevant drivers and software. I know the printer is old but it has plenty of toner left, and worked well. Personally, I wouldn't have bought a Windows 11 PC but it was a birthday present.

Elizabeth Landsburgh

A This printer model is 20 years old, and HP no longer officially supports it. That might have convinced you that the device won't work in modern versions of Windows. However, the company helpfully states that it can be made to work by installing the Windows 8 drivers, while offering no guarantee of smooth operation.

First, visit the HP support page, at www.snipca.com/55728, then click to expand the 'Driver-USB (1)' heading before clicking to download the 'HP LaserJet USB (DOT4)' driver (see screenshot below). Then, to make it work with your 3600n printer, just follow HP's own detailed instructions at www.snipca.com/55729.

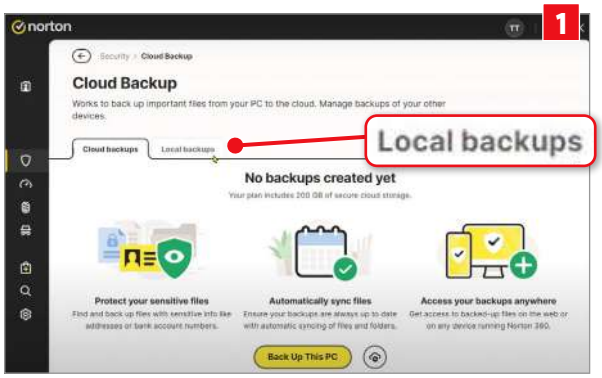


Download the 'HP LaserJet USB (DOT4)' driver from HP's support page

Why can't I back up to my drive with Norton?

Q For years I've backed up my files to my own local hard drive using Norton software, but now it seems Norton will only allow backup to the cloud. Firstly, is this true? Secondly, if so, why? I don't want to use the cloud – I want to to keep control of my data locally.

Brian Rogers

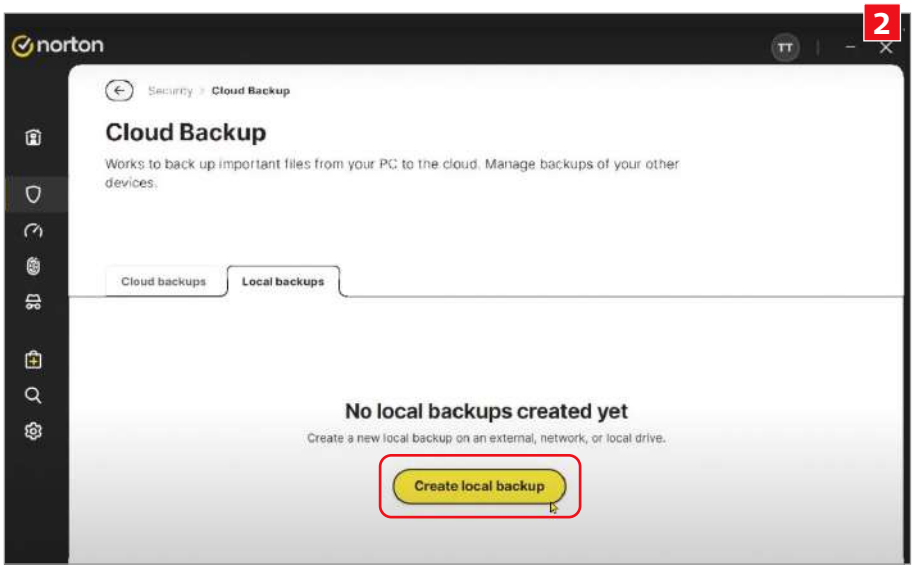


To create a local backup in Norton click this tab in the Cloud Backup section...

A It's both true and not. Late last year, Norton did seem briefly to take leave of its senses, effectively making local backups all but impossible to access – because the option would appear only if the user's allocation of online storage had filled up. We imagine Norton decided to do this because storing backups on its own cloud servers effectively locked users into paying an annual subscription indefinitely.

Following a user backlash, a few months later the company relented and brought back the ability to create local backups. However, the process must be handled manually and it's tricky to find – because it's hidden in the Cloud Backup section!

So, to reach it, first click Security followed by Cloud Backup. Now, click to select the 'Local backups' tab (see screenshot 1). You'll now see a 'Create local backup' button (see screenshot 2) – click this, and follow the onscreen instructions.


2
norton
Security > Cloud Backup
Cloud Backup
Works to back up important files from your PC to the cloud. Manage backups of your other devices.
Cloud backups
Local backups
No local backups created yet
Create a new local backup on an external, network, or local drive.
Create local backup

...then click the 'Create local backup' button and follow the instructions

Q: Can a caller stop me from hanging up?

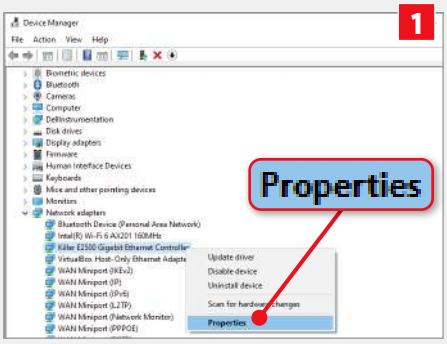
A: Issue 962, page 66 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

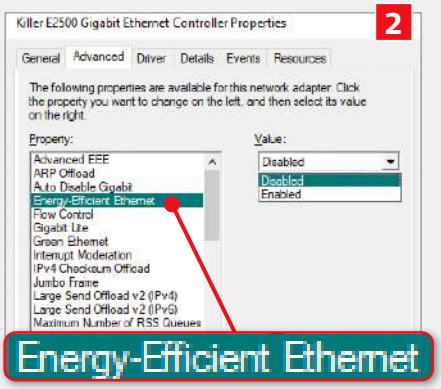
Why is my laptop's Ethernet connection so slow?

Q My HP 15-bw069na laptop runs Windows 11. I recently upgraded my internet speed to 1,000Mbps (1Gbps). Despite this, my laptop Wi-Fi speed never creeps above 50Mbps, so I decided to connect it using an Ethernet cable. However, when running speed tests my laptop's Ethernet never goes above 200Mbps. Using the same cable and router port on my desktop PC, speeds are much closer to 1Gbps. The laptop supposedly has a gigabit Ethernet adapter, so what's going on here?

Ronald Law



In Device Manager right-click the entry for your laptop's Ethernet adapter then click Properties...



...then in the Advanced tab turn off power-saving features that may be slowing your Ethernet connection

A We'll start with a reminder that all such speed claims are always theoretical maximums, which are rarely, if ever, achieved in real-world settings. However, a gigabit Ethernet adapter should reliably perform at speeds much greater than 200Mbps – so there probably is something holding it back.

Because you're using a laptop, the culprit is likely to be a power-saving feature, which might be turned on by default. Such throttles can apply even when on mains power.

To investigate, first press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose Device Manager. Now, click to expand the 'Network adapters' section and right-click the entry for your laptop's Ethernet adapter before choosing Properties (see screenshot 1). Next, click to select the Advanced tab.

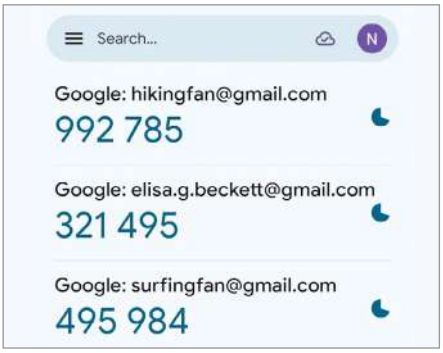
Here, you'll find a whole range of options affecting the performance of the Ethernet adapter, one or several of which might be contributing to the slowdown. Available options depend on the precise specifications of your Ethernet adapter, but look for options like Energy-Efficient Ethernet (see screenshot 2) and Power Saving Mode, and try disabling these. Also look for the 'Speed & Duplex' option, and ensure this is set up for '1.0 Gbps Full Duplex'. This last one should work on your current setup, but if you connect to a different, less-capable network, you might need to switch it back to Auto Negotiation.

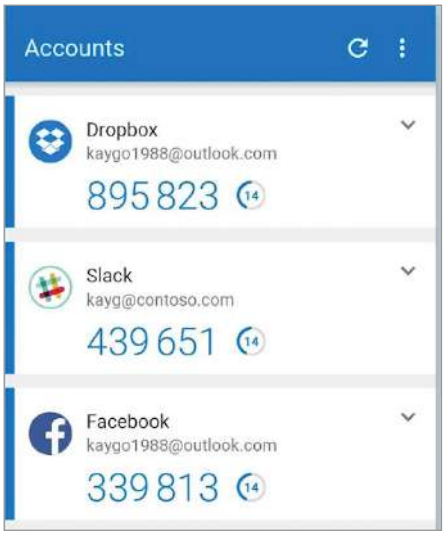
Do authenticator apps risk identity theft?

Q I'm wary of authenticator apps. I seldom used my phone for logins because the screen's too small, and anyway I prefer proper websites. So, I mainly log into accounts via my desktop PC, laptop or iPad. Also, my phone may not be nearby when I'm doing this. This makes me think that authenticator apps will just be a nuisance for me. Is this a case of moving forward by going backwards in terms of ease of use?

Also, if someone steals a phone with an authenticator app on it does this make it easier for them to log into my sites? Does it risk identity theft? For now, I'm avoiding all requests to use one.

Rod Broad





Both Google's (above) and Microsoft's (right) authenticator apps are protected by PINs and biometric locks

A It's true that authenticator apps add a bit more hassle, especially if you don't usually log in on your phone. But in return, you get far better security than using just a password or even text-message two-factor authentication, which are easier for those in the know to intercept or spoof.

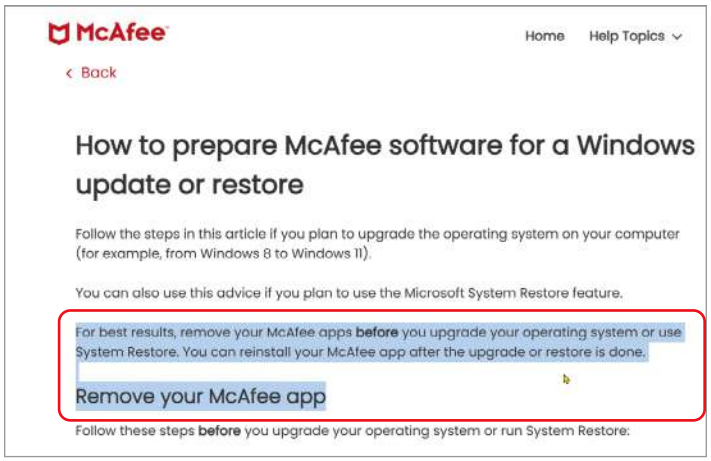
You're also right that a stolen phone could pose a risk. Fortunately, most authenticator apps, including Google's (pictured above) and Microsoft's (above right), are protected by PIN or biometric locks. However, if a thief somehow got past both your phone's lock and the authenticator app's security, then yes, identity theft becomes a real risk.

But realistically, the odds of someone managing that are far lower than them cracking a plain old password. So, yes, authenticator apps are a step back in convenience but on the whole we think they're worth the slight extra toil. See Issue 717 (page 62) for our top choices.

Is my antivirus software blocking Windows updates?

Q I recently had a problem with my desktop PC not receiving Windows updates. A local tech guy said it could be down to my McAfee antivirus, and that uninstalling it might help. I didn't really want to uninstall McAfee, but to his credit, his advice worked. I'm now relying on Microsoft Defender and things like uBlock Origin for web protection. I'm not sure whether to reinstall McAfee at the risk of losing updates again? I do pay a subscription to McAfee, but my confidence and loyalty has been rather shaken.

Lynne Sharpe


McAfee
Home
Help Topics
Back
How to prepare McAfee software for a Windows update or restore
Follow the steps in this article if you plan to upgrade the operating system on your computer (for example, from Windows 8 to Windows 11).
You can also use this advice if you plan to use the Microsoft System Restore feature.
For best results, remove your McAfee apps before you upgrade your operating system or use System Restore. You can reinstall your McAfee app after the upgrade or restore is done.
Remove your McAfee app
Follow these steps before you upgrade your operating system or run System Restore:

McAfee advises customers to uninstall its software when updating Windows

A The very nature of how security software works means that it's sometimes necessary to temporarily disable or even uninstall a tool to perform a major update. Indeed, McAfee itself advises customers to uninstall its software when upgrading Windows (www.snipca.com/55727 – see screenshot)

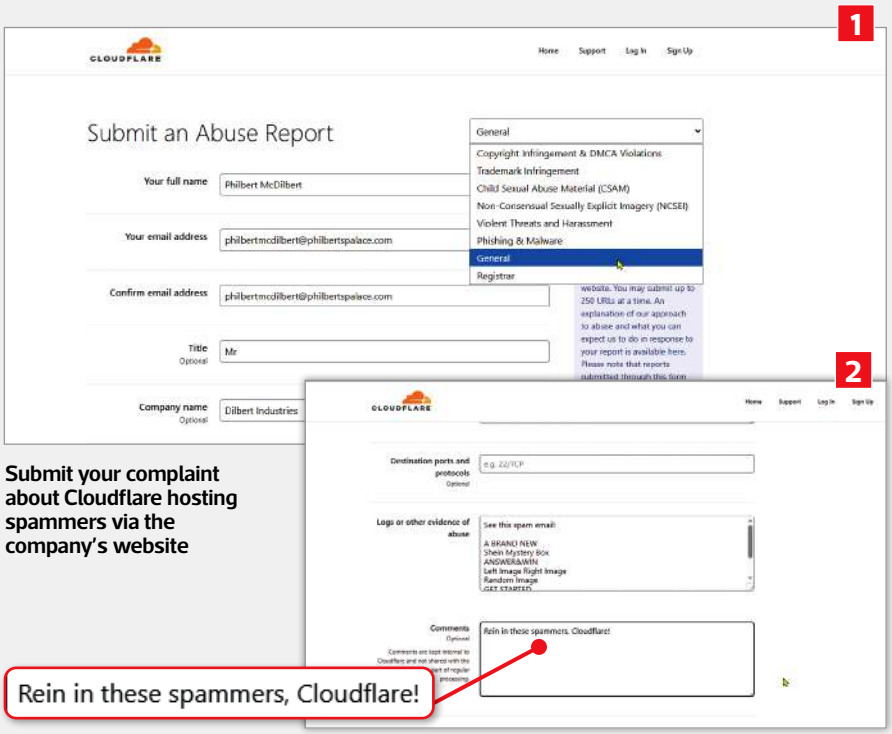
So, while it's both true and unfortunate that your PC's defences might be briefly lowered, disabling third-party security programs is sometimes unavoidable. During that time, Microsoft Defender steps in to keep things safe – as is currently the case on your PC.

Finally, if you were previously happy with McAfee and are still paying the subscription, then just reinstall it. It's a reliable security tool and, if it causes you update problems in the future, it's not such a great effort to temporarily once more disable or uninstall it.

Why is Cloudflare letting spammers send emails?

Q What's happening with web-security firm Cloudflare, whose website (www.cloudflare.com) claims "leading companies depend" on it? I use SpamCop to report and block spam and I've noticed the hosting service of choice for many spammers seems to be Cloudflare. Most of this spam is either offensive or from scammers with fake retail offers. What action can be taken?

Edward Moss



Submit your complaint about Cloudflare hosting spammers via the company's website

A Cloudflare is a large, trusted company used by many legitimate sites. However, the very nature of how it works – being what's known as a proxy – means that its services can also be a benefit to spammers. This is because it allows them to hide their true server details. Cloudflare neither hosts nor scrutinises the content because it positions itself as neutral.

That said, it *has* in the past acted on the back of overwhelming public opinion or law-enforcement requests. For example, a few years ago, following a spate of mass shootings, Cloudflare suspended services to 8chan, an anonymous website known for hosting extremist content. The company explained why on its blog at www.snipca.com/55730.

The only thing you can do, as a user, is submit your own complaint, via https://abuse.cloudflare.com (see screenshot 1). Don't expect overnight action but, if enough people complain about particular spam messages (see screenshot 2), the company might eventually do something about them.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

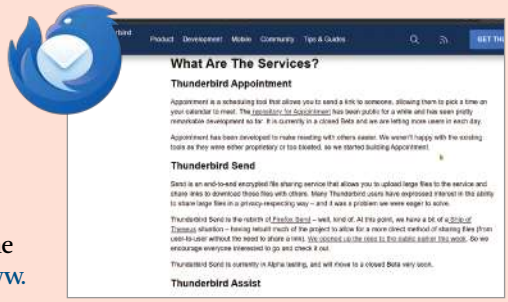
All the different Thunderbird services?

Q Thanks for the Problems Solved section about all the confusing different versions of Outlook in Issue 712 (page 69). As a Thunderbird user, I've been able to ignore Microsoft's confusing product range – but now Thunderbird seems to be heading the same way with its new services (www.snipca.com/55948).

Thundermail seems to be a webmail and storage service, like Gmail or GMX. Do we really need another or can Thunderbird capitalise on its reputation for privacy? And is Thunderbird Send for sending, sharing or something else? And will it work outside Thunderbird?

Thunderbird Appointment seems promising, but wouldn't it be easier as a Calendar upgrade? And will it work with Google Calendar? I lost interest in Thunderbird Assist as soon as I saw 'AI' but what exactly is Thunderbird Pro? I think we need a clearer explanation!

Cliff Grover



A We agree that Mozilla, Thunderbird's developer, seems intent on muddying its own branding in true Microsoft style. The reason is that it wants Thunderbird to be seen as more than an email client. Through this it hopes to be able to market a whole suite of products and services.

Thundermail is probably the easiest to grasp, as it's likely to be just a webmail front end for Thunderbird, much like Gmail or Outlook.com – but, yes, with strong privacy as a key selling point. We say 'likely' because, though it was announced back in April, it's yet to launch.

Similarly, Thunderbird Send sounds like a server to transfer large files, similar to WeTransfer. But, again, it hasn't yet launched – so we're still in the dark. The same goes for Appointment, with no firm details on if or how it'll integrate with other calendars, such as Google or Outlook. Ditto Thunderbird Assist, though we suspect it will claim to use AI to help you manage your inbox.

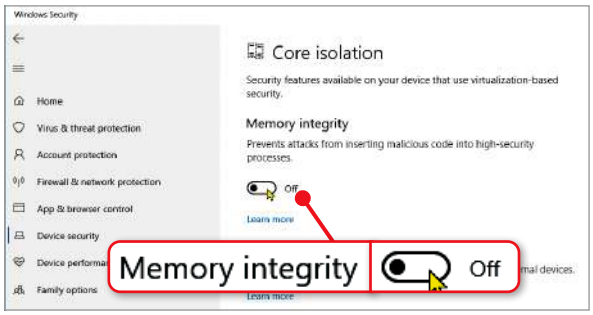
Finally, we think at least with Thunderbird Pro we can be a little more certain, because Mozilla states that it's an umbrella term for all the aforementioned services. As for where it all goes from here, we can only wait and see.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

How do I turn 'Memory integrity' back on?

Q I've been a subscriber for years and your advice has helped me many times. My current problem is with my Windows 11 laptop. I installed Acronis backup software and during the installation it asked me to switch off the 'Memory integrity' feature (see screenshot), found in Windows Security under 'Core isolation' within 'Device security'. This was to enable the installation to finish. I did this and it worked, but I then learned my copy of Acronis was too old to run on my laptop. I then uninstalled it and tried to re-enable 'Memory integrity'. However, I can't do this because I get a warning about incompatible Acronis drivers. Can you tell me how to rectify this?

Diane Pole



Switching off 'Memory integrity' will not enable the installation of older, non-compatible software

A For whatever reason, your old version of Acronis did not uninstall entirely cleanly – so Windows is detecting a couple of leftover files. As these are incompatible with 'Core isolation', the operating system will not allow 'Memory integrity' to be switched back on until these traces are removed.

From the screenshots you sent us we could just make out that the two offending files are 'tib.sys' and 'tib_mounter.sys'. There are indeed known problems with both of these files and 'Core isolation'. As they relate only to one specific feature of Acronis, had the program still been installed you could've fixed the problem by renaming the files. But in your case, you can just delete them.

To do this, press Windows key+E to open File Explorer, then navigate to **C:\Windows\System32\drivers**. Locate each file in turn and press the Delete (Del) key to remove them. Once they're gone, you should be able to switch the 'Memory integrity' slider back on – and then just restart your PC for the change to take effect.

Next Issue

ON SALE **Weds 24 Sep**

- Why does my laptop shut down when gaming?
- Why doesn't my PC recognise my camcorder?
- Can I add an NPU?

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READER OFFER!

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10 devices, 2 years

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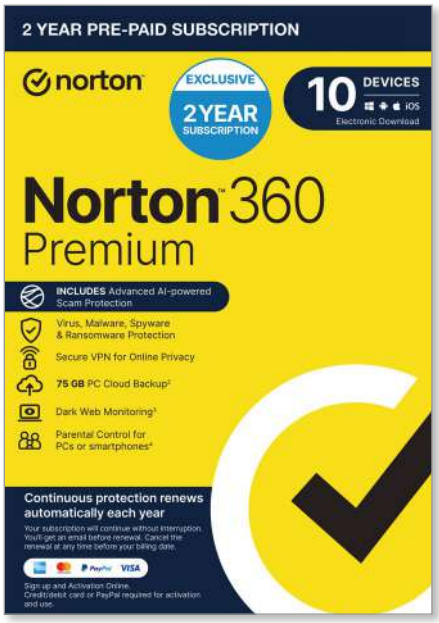
WHAT YOU GET

- ✓ Real-time malware protection
- ✓ Secure VPN
- ✓ 75GB PC Cloud Backup

PLUS Monitors the dark web for your personal information



Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

10 devices for two years NOW ONLY £19.99*

Normally £179.99

Buy it from our Software Store at www.snipca.com/33247

*while stocks last

Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Why can't I sign in after wiping my laptop?

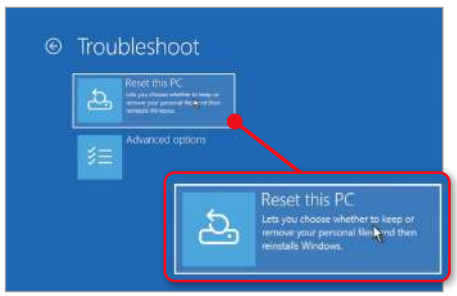
Q **I've tried to wipe my old Dell Inspiron laptop following your instructions in Issue 710's Cover Feature ('Wipe all your old devices'). The procedure appeared to have been completed and the machine switched off. When I restarted it, it asked for a password in the normal way. But having entered this, I got the message: 'The user Profile Service failed the sign-in. User profile cannot be loaded.' So, I'm stuck. Can you help please?**

Richard Palmer

A Are you still seeing your Windows account username above the password box on the Windows login screen? If so, this may mean you haven't successfully wiped your computer using Windows' built-in Reset tool.

To fix this, hold down the Shift key, then click the power icon in the lower-right corner of the login screen and select Restart. On the blue 'Choose an option' screen that opens, click Troubleshoot, then 'Reset this PC' (see screenshot below) and choose the 'Keep my files' option. Select your user account when prompted, then enter your password and click Continue. Choose the 'Local reinstall' option, then click Reset and wait for the process to complete.

You should be able to log into Windows as normal at this point. From here you can attempt the full reset procedure again – simply follow our original instructions in Issue 710's Cover Feature.


Troubleshoot
Reset this PC
Advanced options
Reset this PC
Lets you choose whether to keep or remove your personal files, and then reinstalls Windows.

If you can't log into your PC, hold down the Shift key to restart it and choose 'Reset this PC' in the Troubleshoot options

If you can't see your user account name on the login screen, it may be that the reset procedure has worked and erased all the data stored on your computer – including any local user accounts, which could explain why Windows is now unable to locate your account when you try to log in.

In either case, we'd suggest following our advice in the Cover Feature and taking the additional precaution of running ShredOS (www.snipca.com/54711) on your computer before selling or disposing of it. This will erase everything from your computer, including Windows itself. ShredOS boots and runs from a USB stick, so you won't need to log into Windows to use it. See page 51 of Issue 710's Cover Feature to find out how to use it.

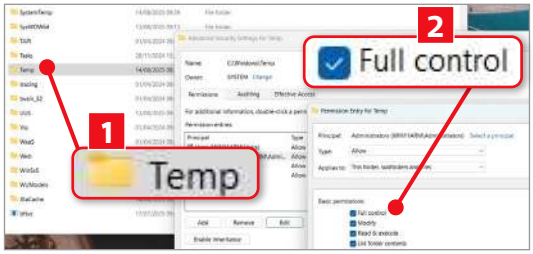
Why can't I download SoftMaker?

Q **Having sought a change from LibreOffice, I tried SoftMaker (www.softmaker.com) – as you recommended in Issue 713's Cover Feature 'Best free software you'll master in minutes'. But my computer showed the error code '2502 / 2503' when I tried to install it. What went wrong?**

Dennis Maitland

A First, you'll need to make sure you download the correct software – SoftMaker Office (available via the URL you mention) and SoftMaker FreeOffice are two distinct products. In 713's Cover Feature, we recommended the latter, which you can download from the URL we published in the feature (www.snipca.com/55249).

If you're still having problems, it could be that your Windows Temp folder has the wrong access permissions – this is often what causes the error codes you're seeing. Open File Explorer and navigate to **This PC/Local Disk (C:\)/Windows**. Inside this folder, you should find the Temp folder (1 in our screenshot above) – right-click this and select Properties. Click the Security tab, then click Advanced. You may need to click Continue in the window that opens to proceed.



If you see '2502 / 2503' error codes during an installation, make sure the 'Full control' box for the Windows/Temp folder is ticked

Now click the Administrators entry in the list of 'Permission entries' then the Edit button. In the next window, make sure there's a tick in the box next to 'Full control' 2, then click OK three times and try installing SoftMaker FreeOffice again.

Why can't I access the Windscribe website?

Q **I'm trying to install the Windscribe VPN from www.snipca.com/55267, as you recommended in Issue 713's '10 PC mistakes we've finally stopped making' feature (page 62). But when I type this URL in my browser's address bar, I get a message that it cannot connect due to lack of a secure connection. Please help.**

Ron Duncan

A The snipca URL works fine for us, using Edge as our browser, with no third-party security tools installed, so it's possible this could be a browser or security-tool issue. You could try typing the full, unshortened URL for the free version of Windscribe (https://windscribe.com/features/use-for-free) to see if this helps. Or you could try an alternative web browser.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

720p A common resolution of high-definition video: 1280x720 pixels.

Architecture A set of rules and language that govern how hardware and software work.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Software built into every PC that connects the vital components. It's visible for a few seconds when the PC starts.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot An AI computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Clone In image-editing software the clone tool allows you to copy one area and paint it over another.

CMOS Complementary metal-oxide semiconductor. A battery that powers the BIOS firmware in your laptop. When a laptop is unplugged, BIOS relies on the CMOS battery for power.

Command Prompt A text-based interface in Windows for writing commands that perform specific tasks.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-ins and more.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 computers with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor Browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

Dolby Atmos Surround-sound technology that adds 'height' to the audio through speakers built into the top of devices.

Dolby Vision Dolby's HDR (High Dynamic Range) screen technology.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems.

Dual-band A Wi-Fi router that works on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text message or email.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

GEDCOM Short for Genealogical Data Communication. A file format used by genealogy programs to share data.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR High Dynamic Range. Screen technology that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history, so other people using your computer can't see which sites you've visited.

IP68 International Protection marking. The '6' denotes that a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand. The '8' indicates that it can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1.5m without effect.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

LLM Large language model. A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Local dimming A screen technology that allows parts of the screen to dim or brighten independently, create a more detailed, distinct image.

Lumen A measure of brightness.

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn by themselves, without further human input.

mAh Milliamp hours. A unit that measures (electric) power over time. The higher the mAh, the longer a battery will last.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

NPU Neural processing unit. Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

OCR Optical character recognition. The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OCuLink Connectivity standard that allows high-speed data transfers between devices using PCI Express.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Package manager A program that helps automate the process of installing, updating, configuring and removing software packages.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

PDF 2.0 Latest version of the PDF standard, introduced in 2017. Improves encryption, accessibility and compatibility.

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

Ping A way to measure how quickly your device gets a response after sending a request for information via the internet.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

POLED Plastic Organic Light-Emitting Diode. A type of OLED screen that uses flexible plastic instead of glass, making it thinner, lighter and more versatile for curved or foldable designs.

PopCnt Population Count. A method for counting the number of ones in a binary number. Typically used for encryption.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

RAM The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on a PC and demand a payment to release them.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

Scart A standard connector for video and audio signals.

Script A short program that is stored on a web server to control part of a website.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a PC.

Tooltip A small message that appears when the cursor hovers over an option.

TOPS Trillion operations per second. A measure of a PC's processing power when performing AI tasks.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Travel The distance the keys of a keyboard have to be pressed before the keystroke is recognised.

Tri-band A router that broadcasts on three radio bands – 2.4GHz, 5GHz and 6GHz.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

UEFI A modern replacement for the BIOS

Ultra HD Ultra high definition. Resolution of 3840x2160.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VESA A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

Virtual machine A software-based computer running inside another computer.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

XLSX The default file format for Microsoft Excel since version 2007.

XML Extensible Markup Language. A versatile type of document that can store various types of information.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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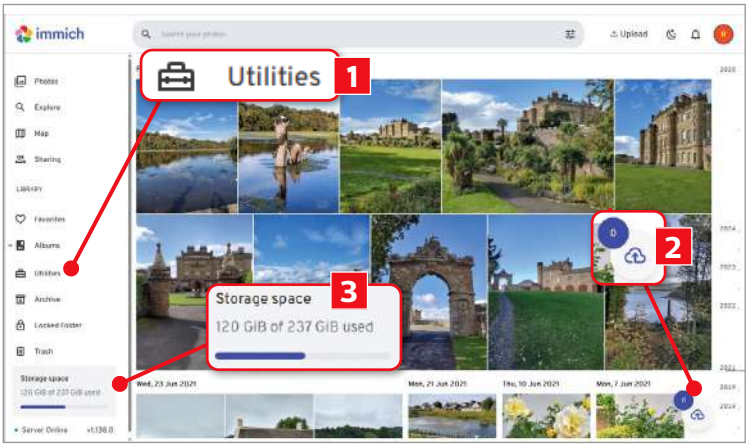
Know How

Worried that Google Photos is analysing his personal pictures, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Back up photos to a private server

I've always regarded the Memories feature in Google Photos with a warm feeling of nostalgic delight. Its slideshows of relaxing holidays, beloved pets and old friends have been welcome reminders of times gone by.

That changed the other day when the Memories carousel displayed an embarrassing photo of me wearing a white vest. I can't recall taking this selfie, nor of sporting the mystery undershirt while scowling at the camera. But Google Photos clearly deemed the moment memorable enough to bring it up now with the caption '8 years since... [you looked silly in a vest]'.



Robert used Immich to set up a private server for his photos with 236GB of storage

> Even Immich devotees warn it's tricky to set up, as I soon discovered

This got me wondering what else Google Photos 'remembers' about where I've been and when, and what I was wearing. I know Google uses AI to scan your pictures for various reasons. But seeing my exposed shoulders made me question the wisdom of trusting my personal photos to a company hardly renowned for respecting users' privacy.

Although there are alternative photo-storage services, I decided the best solution would be to back up my pictures to my own private server using Immich (www.immich.app). This free open-source project from a German developer has been described as the perfect replacement for Google Photos (see www.snipca.com/55986).

However, even Immich devotees warn it's tricky to set up, which proved to be the case. I first downloaded Docker Desktop for Windows (www.snipca.com/55987), a tool used by developers to run software 'containers'. I installed the program, ticking the boxes for installing WSL 2 components and running containers, then restarted my PC. I then ran Docker Desktop, signed up for a free account and left it running in the background.

Next, I visited Immich's GitHub page, found the latest release at www.snipca.com/55988 and downloaded the files 'docker-compose.yml' and 'example.env', as instructed by a helpful post on Reddit. I moved them to a new folder that I labelled 'Immich', and still following the advice, renamed the file 'example.env' as '.env'.

I now right-clicked an empty area in the folder, chose 'Open in Terminal' to launch PowerShell and typed the command `docker compose up -d`. On pressing Enter, a bunch of Immich container files started downloading, indicating I was doing something right.

Once the downloads were complete, I opened my browser, typed `http://localhost:2283` and pressed Enter. Amazingly, this opened the Immich welcome page, where I clicked Getting Started. I entered an admin email address, password and name, clicked 'Sign up' and logged in.

After configuring a few settings, I clicked 'Done' and Immich loaded in my browser. Its layout was very similar to the Google Photos web interface, with many of the same options in the left-hand menu.

I noted a Map feature, which shows the locations photos were taken, and a handy tool in the Utilities section (1 in our screenshot) for reviewing duplicate images. In my account settings, I found further useful features including facial recognition.

Of course, none of these were of any use until I'd actually added some photos. Immich doesn't offer an option for importing from Google Photos, so I clicked the Upload button 2 and selected images from my PC.

These uploaded speedily and without any problems, and Immich organised them by date – just like Google Photos does. I then installed Immich's Android app (www.snipca.com/55990 – there's also an iOS app: www.snipca.com/55991) to back up photo albums from my phone. This required signing into my server at `http://[my IP address]:2283`.

I was pleased to see my storage limit was a huge 237GB 3 – basically the size of my SSD because I was hosting my own server. That's much more than the 15GB I get from Google Photos.

Immich was tough to set up, and requires running Docker Desktop every time you want to access your server. But being a vest-wearing hard type I got there in the end and it was definitely worth the effort.

Need help with backing up your photo collections? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to create a smart light switch

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